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GEMS OF CHINESE LITERATURE

VERSE

BY

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SECOND EDITION
REVISED AND GREATLY ENLARGED

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PREFACE

In translating Chinese poetry, so soon as the meaning has been secured, there is always open for its reproduction a choice between rhymed verse and prose. Personally, I am on the side of the former. It is a much more difficult feat to achieve than a prose rendering, further involving, as it does, considerable "labour of the file;" that is, if the *meaning*, which is essential in both cases, is to be retained in approximately all its fullness,—a consummation unfortunately denied to the *spirit*, whether the vehicle be verse or prose.

All Chinese poetry is lyrical, in the sense that it was originally intended to be set to music and sung; and the great bulk of it is also lyrical in the later senses of the term, as well as in rhyme. Swinburne, in his *Essays and Studies*, 1875, says "Rhyme is the native condition of lyric verse in English; a rhymeless lyric is a maimed thing." Mr. George Moore in *The Observer* of 9th June, 1918, declares that "verse cannot be translated into verse," and that

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all such attempts are "an amateurish adventure." It will surprise many to hear that Conington, Fitzgerald, Rossetti, Burton, and other notable translators of verse into verse were mere amateurs; all the same, Mr. Moore is entitled to his own opinion. Keats, on the other hand, tells us that never did he breathe the pure serene of Homer until he heard Chapman speak out loud and bold in his rhymed versions of the Iliad and the Odyssey; but there is no record of any one into whose ken the accurate prose version of Butcher and Lang has ever swum like a new planet.

Herewith a word-for-word translation of "The Chaste Wife's Reply" (p. 171), with which the general reader may compare my rhymed version, and may be able to judge how far I have drifted from the meaning of the original.

Sir know handmaid have husband
Offer handmaid pair bright pearls
Sympathize sir entangle floss purpose
Wrap stop red silk vest
Handmaid home lofty storey connect park rise
Good man hold halberd bright glory inside
Know sir use mind like sun moon
Serve husband swear intend together live die
Return sir bright pearls pair tears drop
Hate not mutual meet not marry time

The above is written with five words to each of the first four lines, and with seven words to the remaining six. It must

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not be supposed that each Chinese monosyllable presents to the reader the same bald front as the English equivalent which I have set down. That is where style and spirit come in; neither of them communicable in an alien tongue.

Chinese poetry may be written with any number of words from one to eleven, or even more, to each line; and it is hoped that the above example will show how it is possible to extract sense from a congeries of monosyllables unconnected by most of the parts of speech which guide, or fail to guide, the reader of an English poem. This feature, constant in Chinese poetry, can be produced as a *tour de force* in other languages. A verse, consisting of only one monosyllabic word to the line, which yields immediate sense, and one sense only, can easily be constructed in English. With apologies for its triviality, I hasten to add—

Boy
Jam
Joy
Cram
Ill
Bed
Pill
Dead

The first edition of this work was published in 1898, and has long been out of print. The present edition, considerably enlarged, is a companion volume to "Gems

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of Chinese Literature," also in its second and enlarged edition, which contains specimens from the great prose writers of all ages down to the present day. My best thanks are due to my son, Mr. Lancelot Giles, H.B.M. Consul at Ch'ang-sha, who has carried out for me the troublesome task of proof-reading.

HERBERT A. GILES.

Cambridge, 1922.

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Dear Land of Flowers, forgive me!——that I took
These snatches from thy glittering wealth of song,
And twisted to the uses of a book
Strains that to alien harps can ne'er belong.

Thy gems shine purer in their native bed
Concealed, beyond the pry of vulgar eyes;
Until, through labyrinths of language led,
The patient student grasps the glowing prize.

Yet many, in their race toward other goals,
May joy to feel, albeit at second-hand,
Some far faint heart-throb of poetic souls
Whose breath makes incense in the Flowery Land.

H. A. G.

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THE ODES

[These are some 300 of the old national ballads of China, collected and edited by Confucius, 551–479 B.C. On one occasion, the Master said to his son, "Have you studied the *Odes*?" And on receiving an answer in the negative, Confucius warned him, saying, "If you do not study the *Odes*, you will have no command of language."]

1.

TO A YOUNG GENTLEMAN

Don't come in, sir, please!
Don't break my willow-trees!
Not that *that* would very much grieve me;
But alack-a-day! what would my parents say?
And love you as I may,
I cannot bear to think what that would be.

Don't cross my wall, sir, please!
Don't spoil my mulberry-trees!
Not that *that* would very much grieve me;
But alack-a-day! what would my brothers say?
And love you as I may,
I cannot bear to think what that would be.

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Keep outside, sir, please!
Don't spoil my sandal-trees!
Not that *that* would very much grieve me;
But alack-a-day! what the world would say!
And love you as I may,
I cannot bear to think what that would be.*

*Set to music by Cyril Scott and J. A. Carpenter.

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2.

A MALE LIGHT-OF-LOVE

Away I must run;
There is work to be done,
Though I'm thinking to-day
Of the eldest Miss K.
In the mulberry-grove
I shall pour out my love;
For she's promised to meet me
And as lover to greet me—
The eldest Miss K.

Away I must run;
There is work to be done.
But to-day I shall be
With the eldest Miss E.

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In the mulberry-grove
I shall pour out my love;
For she's promised to meet me
And as lover to greet me—
The eldest Miss E.

Away I must run;
There is work to be done.
But to-day I shall sigh.
For the eldest Miss Y.
In the mulberry-grove
I shall pour out my love;
For she's promised to meet me
And as lover to greet me—
The eldest Miss Y.

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3.

"AT BEST A CONTRADICTION"

A clever man will build a town,
A clever woman pull it down.
Though woman's wit is sometimes heard,
She's really an ill-omened bird;
Her long tongue's like a flight of stairs
Which leads to miserable cares.
It is not God who mars our lives,
The fault is rather with our wives.
Of all we cannot teach or train,
Women and eunuchs are our bane.

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4.

DESPERATE!

The ripe plums are falling,—
  One-third of them gone;
To my lovers I'm calling,
  "'Tis time to come on!"

The ripe plums are dropping,—
  Two-thirds are away;
"'Tis time to be popping!"
  To my lovers I say.

Down has dropt every plum!
  In baskets they lie.
What, will no lover come?
  "Now or never!" say I.

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5.

TO A MAN

You seemed a guileless youth enough,
Offering for silk your woven stuff;*
But silk was not required by you:
I was the silk you had in view.

With you I crossed the ford, and while
We wandered on for many a mile
I said, "I do not wish delay,
But friends must fix our wedding-day....
Oh, do not let my words give pain,
But with the autumn come again."

And then I used to watch and wait
To see you passing through the gate;

*Pieces of stamped linen, used as a circulating medium before the introduction of the bank-note.

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And sometimes when I watched in vain,
My tears would flow like falling rain;
But when I saw my darling boy,
I laughed and cried aloud for joy.
The fortune-tellers, you declared,
Had all pronounced us duly paired;
"Then bring a carriage," I replied,
"And I'll away to be your bride."

The mulberry-leaf, not yet undone
By autumn chill, shines in the sun.
O tender dove, I would advise,
Beware the fruit that tempts thy eyes!†
O maiden fair, not yet a spouse,
List lightly not to lovers' vows!
A man may do this wrong, and time
Will fling its shadow o'er his crime;
A woman who has lost her name
Is doomed to everlasting shame.

†The dove is very fond of mulberries, and is said to become intoxicated by them.

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The mulberry-tree upon the ground
Now sheds its yellow leaves around.
Three years have slipped away from me,
Since first I shared your poverty;
And now again, alas the day!
Back through the ford I take my way.
My heart is still unchanged, but you
Have uttered words now proved untrue;
And you have left me to deplore
A love that can be mine no more.

For three long years I was your wife,
And led in truth a toilsome life;
Early to rise and late to bed,
Each day alike passed o'er my head.
I honestly fulfilled my part;
And you,—well, you have broke my heart.
The truth my brothers will not know,
So all the more their gibes will flow.

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I grieve in silence and repine
That such a wretched fate is mine.

Ah, hand in hand to face old age! —
Instead, I turn a bitter page.
Oh for the river-banks of yore;
Oh for the much-loved marshy shore;
The hours of girlhood, with my hair
Ungathered, as we lingered there.
The words we spoke, that seemed so true,
I little thought that I should rue;
I little thought the vows we swore
Would some day bind us two no more.

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6.

THE CRICKET

The cricket chirrups in the hall,
The year is dying fast;
Now let us hold high festival
Ere the days and months be past.
Yet push not revels to excess
That our fair fame be marred;
Lest pleasures verge to wickedness
Let each be on his guard.

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1.

THE HUSBANDMAN'S SONG

Work, work,—from the rising sun
Till sunset comes and the day is done
I plough the sod
And harrow the clod,
And meat and drink both come to me,
So what care I for the powers that be?

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2.

YAO'S ADVICE*

With trembling heart and cautious steps
  Walk daily in fear of God....
Though you never trip over a mountain,
  You may often trip over a clod.

*An Emperor of the 3rd millennium B.C., formerly regarded as legendary.

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3.

INSCRIPTION ON A WASH-BASIN

Oh, rather than sink in the world's foul tide
I would sink in the bottomless main;
For he who sinks in the world's foul tide
In noisome depths shall for ever abide,
But he who sinks in the bottomless main
May hope to float to the surface again.

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CH'Ü YÜAN OR CH'Ü P'ING

332–295 B.C.

[The typical loyal statesman of China. Unable to prevail against the evil policy of his sovereign, he committed suicide by drowning. The modern Dragon-Boat festival is supposed to be a search for his body. See *"Gems of Chinese Literature."*]

1.

THE BATTLE

We take our trusty spears in hand,
  We don our coats of mail;*
When chariot-wheels are interlocked,
  With daggers we assail.
Standards obscure the light of day,
  Like rushing clouds their brunt;
Arrows on both sides fall around;
  All struggle to the front.
Our line at last is broken through,
  Beneath the foeman's heels;
My own near horse is killed outright,
  The off horse wounded reels,

*Of buffalo-hide; not of rhinoceros-hide, as has been wrongly supposed.

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The team becomes a useless mass,
  Entangled in the wheels.
With stick of jade I strike the drum,†
  And beat to hurry on,
For though by God's decree I fell,
  My ardour was not gone.
Our best men were all done to death,
  Their corpses strewed the plain;
They went out but did not come in,
  Not to return again,
And now upon the battle-field,
  Far from their homes they lie,
Their long swords still within their grasp,
  And their stout bows near by.
A head is here, a body there,
  And yet they never quailed,
Being so brave and soldiers too,
  Nor in their duty failed.
But now, though lifeless clay, their souls
  Are with the heavenly hosts,
To lead once more an army corps
  Of disembodied ghosts.

†The drum is the signal for advance, the gong for retreat.

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2.

COMMEMORATION SERVICE AND AFTER

The funeral rites are over;
  Now let us beat the drum.....
The priest gives up his plantain-wand,*
  And now the dancers come.
In unison fair maidens sing,
  "Asters for autumn, orchids for spring"—
Thus it always is,
  And thus it has always been.†

*Passing it on to the next dancer after his own performance.

†Life must go on again as usual, with dance and song and flowers.

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SUNG YÜ

4TH CENTURY B.C.

[Nephew of Ch'ü Yüan, and like his uncle a statesman and a poet.]

UNPOPULARITY

Among birds the phœnix, among fishes the leviathan
holds the chiefest place;
Cleaving the crimson clouds
the phœnix soars apace,
With only the blue sky above,
far into the realms of space;
But the grandeur of heaven and earth
is as naught to the hedge-sparrow race.
And the leviathan rises in one ocean
to go to rest in a second,
While the depth of a puddle by a humble minnow

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as the depth of the sea is reckoned.
And just as with birds and fishes,
so too it is with man;
Here soars a phœnix,
there swims a leviathan.
Behold the philosopher, full of nervous thought,
with a fame that never grows dim,
Dwelling complacently alone,—say,
what can the vulgar herd know of him?

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MEI SHÊNG

2ND CENTURY B.C.

[Statesman and poet, of whose writings only nine short poems remain.]

1.

NEGLECTED

Green grows the grass upon the bank,
The willow-shoots are long and lank;
A lady in a glistening gown
Opens the casement and looks down.
The roses on her cheek blush bright,
Her rounded arm is dazzling white;
A singing-girl in early life,
And now a careless roué's wife.....
Ah, if he does not mind his own,
He'll find some day the bird has flown!

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2.

PARTED

The red hibiscus and the reed,
The fragrant flowers of marsh and mead,—
All these I gather as I stray,
As though for one now far away.
I strive to pierce with straining eyes
The distance that between us lies.
Alas that hearts which beat as one
Should thus be parted and undone!

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T'AI TSUNG (LIU HÊNG)

DIED 156 B.C.

[Fourth Emperor of the Han dynasty, and a wise ruler. He is one of the 24 examples of filial piety, having waited on his sick mother for three years without changing his clothes.]

ON THE DEATH OF HIS FATHER

I look up, the curtains are there as of yore;
I look down, and there is the mat on the floor;
These things I behold, but the man is no more.

To the infinite azure his spirit has flown,
And I am left friendless, uncared-for, alone,
Of solace bereft, save to weep and to moan.

The deer on the hillside caressingly bleat,
And offer the grass for their young ones to eat,
While birds of the air to their nestlings bring meat.

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But I a poor orphan must ever remain,
My heart, still so young, overburdened with pain
For him I shall never set eyes on again.

'Tis a well-worn old saying, which all men allow,
That grief stamps the deepest of lines on the brow:
Alas for my hair, it is silvery now!

Alas for my father, cut off in his pride!
Alas that no more I may stand by his side!
Oh where were the gods when that great hero died?

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SHIH TSUNG (LIU CH'Ê)

156–87 B.C.

[Sixth Emperor of the Han dynasty. During his reign copper coins were cast, academical degrees were instituted, Greek music took the place of the old native art, and the calendar was scientifically reformed. Personally, he was a Taoist and made efforts to obtain an elixir of immortality.]

1.

AMARI ALIQUID

The autumn blast drives the white scud in the sky,
Leaves fade, and wild geese sweeping south meet the eye;
The scent of late flowers fills the soft air above,
My heart full of thoughts of the lady I love.
In the river the barges for revel-carouse
Are lined by white waves which break over their bows;
Their oarsmen keep time to the piping and drumming....
Yet joy is as naught
Alloyed by the thought
That youth slips away and that old age is coming.

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2.

GONE*

The sound of rustling silk is stilled,
With dust the marble courtyard filled;
No footfalls echo on the floor,
Fallen leaves in heaps block up the door...
For she, my pride, my lovely one is lost,
And I am left, in hopeless anguish tossed.

*Referring to the loss of a favourite concubine.

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PAN CHIEH-YÜ

1ST CENTURY B.C.

[For a long time chief favourite of the Emperor Ch'êng Ti. "Chieh-yü" was a title conferred upon the concubine most distinguished for literary ability.]

THE AUTUMN FAN*

O fair white silk, fresh from the weaver's loom,
Clear as the frost, bright as the winter snow—
See! friendship fashions out of thee a fan,
Round as the round moon shines in heaven above;
At home, abroad, a close companion thou,
Stirring at every move the grateful gale;
And yet I fear, ah me! that autumn chills,
Cooling the dying summer's torrid rage,
Will see thee laid neglected on the shelf,
All thought of by-gone days, like them by-gone.

*This term is now used of a deserted wife.

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ANONYMOUS

1ST CENTURY B.C.

1.

CARPE DIEM

Man reaches scarce a hundred, yet his tears
Would fill a lifetime of a thousand years.
When days are short and night's long hours move slow,
Why not with lamp in search of pleasure go?
This day alone gives sure enjoyment—this!
Why then await to-morrow's doubtful bliss?
Fools grudge to spend their wealth while life abides,
And then posterity their thrift derides.
We cannot hope, like Wang Tzŭ-ch'iao,* to rise
And find a paradise beyond the skies.

*A prince of the 6th century B.C., who rode up to heaven on the back of a crane. See *Ts'ui Hao.*

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ANONYMOUS

2.

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

Forth from the eastern gate my steeds I drive,
And lo! a cemetery meets my view;
Aspens around in wild luxuriance thrive,
The road is fringed with fir and pine and yew.
Beneath my feet lie the forgotten dead,
Wrapped in a twilight of eternal gloom;
Down by the Yellow Springs* their earthy bed,
And everlasting silence is their doom.
How fast the lights and shadows come and go!
Like morning dew our fleeting life has passed;
Man, a poor traveller on earth below,
Is gone, while brass and stone can still outlast.

*The Chinese Hades.

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Time is inexorable, and in vain
Against his might the holiest mortal strives;
Can *we* then hope this precious boon to gain,
By strange elixirs to prolong our lives?...
Oh, rather quaff good liquor while we may,
And dress in silk and satin every day!

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FÊNG YEN

1ST CENTURY A.D.

[A precocious boy—at 9 he could repeat the *Odes*—who entered official life under Wang Mang, the Usurper, and later on served under the first two Emperors of the E. Han dynasty. He left behind him a large collection of miscellaneous writings.]

"A BOLD PEASANTRY"

When you ride in a cart,
    let the wheels be your care;
In governing States,
    look well after the masses.
For just as a cart
    without wheels cannot fare,
So a State comes to grief
    if reduced to the classes.

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ANONYMOUS

1ST OR 2ND CENTURY A.D.

[From the *Yo fu* collection.]

1.

TO A DEPARTING HUSBAND

Drawn by brave steeds thy chariot
out on its way has set;
My heart will always follow thee
and never can forget.
Upon thy western journey now
I wish thee all repose.....
Ah, would I were thy shadow, dear,
that I might follow close!
But a gloom has closed around thee,
and thy shadow is not near.
Oh, pass into the light of day
and once again appear!

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2.

A WAITING WIFE

Boom!—Boom!—the thunder peals;
A sense of happening o'er me steals.
I turn my ear to catch the sound—
'Tis not thy chariot-wheels!

3.

"WHAT IS FRIENDSHIP BUT A NAME?"

I had a friend, a school-boy chum,
  And hand in hand we took our way;
But he to higher things has come,
  And I am left alone to-day.

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4.

A TRYST

In the snow on the mountain
a hero is sitting....
Through the forest by moonlight
a maiden is flitting....

5.

LOVE'S SWAY

When Love has carried off the heart
ten thousand miles away,
The glittering starlit sky above
seems reft of every ray.

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K'UNG JUNG

DIED A.D. 208.

[A descendant from Confucius in the 20th Generation, and an anti-prohibitionist. "If my halls are full of guests," he said, "and my jars are full of wine, I am happy." He was put to death by Ts'ao Ts'ao (see *Gems of Chinese Literature.*)]

A FIRST-BORN

The wanderer reaches home with joy
From absence of a year and more;
His eye seeks a beloved boy —
His wife lies weeping on the floor.

They whisper he is gone. The glooms
Of evening fall; beyond the gate
A lonely grave in outline looms
To greet the sire who came too late.

Forth to the little mound he flings,
Where wild-flowers bloom on every side...
His bones are in the Yellow Springs,
His flesh like dust is scattered wide.

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"O child who never knew thy sire,
For ever now to be unknown,
Ere long thy wandering ghost shall tire
Of flitting friendless and alone.

"O son, man's greatest earthly boon,
With thee I bury hopes and fears."
He bowed his head in grief and soon
His breast was wet with rolling tears.

Life's dread uncertainty he knows,
But oh for this untimely close!

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HSÜ KAN

2ND AND 3RD CENTURIES A.D.

[An official and poet who was ranked as one of the Seven Scholars of his day.]

AN ABSENT HUSBAND

O floating clouds that swim in heaven above
Bear on your wings these words to him I love....
Alas, you float along nor heed my pain,
And leave me here to love and long in vain!

I see other dear ones to their homes return,
And for his coming shall not I too yearn?
Since my lord left —— ah me, unhappy day! ——
My mirror's dust has not been brushed away;
My heart, like running water, knows no peace,
But bleeds and bleeds forever without cease.*

*See *Chang Chiu-ling.*

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FU YÜAN

3RD CENTURY A.D.

[A scholar and statesman who rose by the year 268 to be Censor and Imperial Chamberlain. He was of such an eager disposition that whenever he had any Memorial to submit to the Emperor, he would proceed at once to the palace, at no matter what hour of the day or night, and sit there until audience at the following dawn. Thus he caught the chill of which he died. Seven only of his poems are still extant.]

LOVE IMPETUOUS

The lover and maiden are fair to be seen;
Though close are their homes, there are mountains between.
With a cloud for a car and the wind for a horse,
The lover and maiden might meet in due course,
But clouds are uncertain, and breezes may drop,
While love is impatient and suffers no stop.

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TS'AO CHIH

A.D. 192–232.

[Son of the great Ts'ao Ts'ao, and like Hsü Kan one of the Seven Scholars of his day. He is said to have composed an impromptu stanza while walking only seven steps; reminding us of Lucilius, who threw off two hundred lines *stans pede in uno*.]

THE BROTHERS

A fine dish of beans had been placed in the pot
With a view to a good mess of pottage, all hot.
The beanstalks, aflame, a fierce heat were begetting,
The beans in the pot were all fuming and fretting.
Yet the beans and the stalks were not born to be foes;
Oh why should these hurry to finish off those?

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LIU KUN

DIED A.D. 317.

[A distinguished military commander. While defending the city of Chin-yang against the Tartars, with no prospect of holding out, he mounted a tower by moonlight and played on the Tartar pipe. The besiegers were so overcome by their emotions and thoughts of home that next morning they raised the siege.]

A BARMAID

A rainbow at morning was bridging the sky,
And fragrant a stream full of lilies hard by,
When lo! I beheld a young maid of fifteen,
Who stood, sweetly smiling, behind the canteen.

She outshone the flowers which blossomed around;
Men grudged that her shadow should fall on the ground;
So peerless her beauty and youth, —— in a trice
I found I had paid for my wine double price!

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FU MI

3RD AND 4TH CENTURIES A.D.

1.

LOVERS PARTED

In the Kingdom of Yen
a young gallant resides,
In the Kingdom of Chao
a fair damsel abides;
No long leagues of wearisome
road intervene,
But a chain of steep mountains
is set in between.
Ye clouds, on your broad bosoms
bear me afar,
The winds for my horses
made fast to my car!

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Ah, jade lies deep hid
in the bowels of earth;
To the fair epidendrum
the prairie gives birth;
And the clouds in the sky,
they come not at call;
And the fickle breeze rises,
alas, but to fall.
And so I am left
with my thoughts to repine,
And think of that loved one
who ne'er can be mine.

2.

AFTER PARTING

Thy chariot and horses
have gone, and I fret
And long for the lover
I ne'er can forget.

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O wanderer, bound
in far countries to dwell,
Would I were thy shadow! —
I'd follow thee well.

And though clouds and though darkness
my presence should hide,
In the bright light of day
I would stand by thy side!

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ANONYMOUS

TRUE PLEASURES

The bright moon shining overhead,
  The stream beneath the breeze's touch,
Are pure and perfect joys indeed, ——
  But few are they who think them such.

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T'AO CH'IEN (T'AO YÜAN-MING)

A.D. 365–427.

[A magistrate who held office for only 83 days, resigning on the ground that he could not "crook the hinges of his back for five pecks of rice a day," his official salary. In private life he occupied himself with writing beautiful poetry, with music and flowers. He even composed his own funeral oration.]

1.

A PORTRAIT*

A scholar lives on yonder hill,
His clothes are rarely whole to view,
Nine times a month he eats his fill,
Once in ten years his hat is new.

A wretched lot! — and yet the while
He ever wears a sunny smile.

*This poem is meant as a description of the writer.

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Longing to know what like was he,
At dawn my steps a path unclosed
Where dark firs left the passage free
And on the eaves the white clouds dozed.

But he, when spying my intent,
Seized his guitar and swept the strings;
Up flew a crane towards heaven bent,
And now a startled pheasant springs....

Oh, I would live beside my friend—
But not beyond the summer's end.

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2.

A PRAYER

Ye fluttering birds in plumage gay
  That to and fro direct your flight,—
The Western Mother's* court by day,
  The far-off mountain-peaks at night,—
Oh, be my messengers and go
  And bear to her these words of mine:
I ask for nothing here below
  Save length of years and depth of wine!

*Now known to be Hera (Juno). See *Adversaria Sinica*, 1st Series, p. 1 and p. 298.

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3.

SIC TRANSIT

A tower a hundred feet erect
  Looks round upon the scene which girds;
'Tis here at eve the clouds collect,
  At dawn a trysting-place for birds.

Here hills and streams the observer hold,
  Or boundless prairie mocks the eyes:
Some famous warriors of old
  Made this their bloody battle-prize.

The centuries of time roll on,
  And I, a traveller, passing there,
Mark firs and cypresses all gone,
  And grave-mounds, high and low, laid bare.
The ruined tombs uncared-for stand—
  Where do their wandering spirits hide?—
Oh, glory makes us great and grand,
  And yet it has its seamy side.

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?

PAO CHAO

DIED A.D. 466.

[An official and well-known poet. He was killed in a rebellion.]

ALONE

What do these halls of jasper mean,
and shining floor,
Where tapestries of satin screen
window and door?
A lady on a lonely seat,
embroidering
Fair flowers which seem to smell as sweet
as buds in spring.
Swallows flit past, a zephyr shakes
the plum-blooms down;
She draws the blind, a goblet takes
her thoughts to drown.
And now she sits in tears, or hums,
nursing her grief
That in her life joy rarely comes
to bring relief.....
Oh for the humble turtle's flight,
my mate and I;
Not the lone crane far out of sight
beyond the sky!

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CHIANG YEN

A.D. 443–504.

[A statesman and voluminous writer. He is responsible for the first biography of a woman ever published in China.]

FORGOTTEN

To learn the art of fencing, forth
I wandered, with my master, north.
I saw an ancient battle-plain
Engirt by hills which still remain;
And while I gazed upon the scene,
A wide expanse of sky and green,
I thought how like a summer's day
Each warrior's name has passed away.

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WU TI (HSIAO YEN)

A.D. 464–549.

[Founder in 502 of the Liang dynasty. A devout Buddhist, he interpreted the commandment "Thou shalt not kill!" in its strictest sense, and caused the sacrificial victims to be made of dough. Under stress of rebellion, he took refuge in a monastery, and died there of want and mortification.]

1.

"IN THE SPRING....."

At the steps I am met
by a scent-laden breeze;
The flowers in the court-yard
are smiling their best.
When the mind is affected
by spring thoughts like these,
Do you wonder that passion
flames up in my breast?

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2.

ULTIMATE CAUSES

Trees grow, not alike,
by the mound and the moat;
Birds sing in the forest
with varying note;
Of the fish in the river
some dive and some float;
The mountains rise high
and the waters sink low,
But the why and the wherefore
we never can know.

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LIU HSIAO-WEI

6TH CENTURY A.D.

[An official in the service of the Prince of Chin-an. He died of disease during the campaign against the rebel, Hou Ching, A.D. 552.]

AT FIRST SIGHT

A couple of love-birds philandering nigh;
The moon intermittently seen in the sky...
Stay, who is the beauty with flowers in her hand,
Whose eyes and whose eyebrows my senses command?
Rich blues and bright greens shine behind the glass door,
And a casket of jade contains raiment galore;
The maiden herself is quite young, I believe,
For she blushes and smiles as the wind flirts her sleeve.

. . . . . .

The bolt to the crossbow can never return,
And how quench the passion with which I now burn?

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HSIEH TAO-HÊNG

6TH AND 7TH CENTURIES A.D.

[A statesman noted for his brilliant scholarship. He was called the Confucius of the West, a title which had already been given to a greater scholar of the 2nd Century A.D. He managed to offend the Emperor, and was put to death.]

ANTICIPATION

A week in the spring to the exile appears
Like an absence from home of a couple of years.
If home, with the wild geese of autumn, we're going,
Our hearts will be off ere the spring flowers are blowing.

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WANG CHI

6TH AND 7TH CENTURIES A.D.

[A strange, unconventional philosopher and poet; author, among other works, of a skit entitled Drunk Land. His career was marred by drunkenness, for which the disturbed and dangerous times may be pleaded as some excuse.]

1.

TO A KILL-JOY

Indulgence in the flowing bowl
Impedes the culture of the soul;
And yet, when all around me swill,
Shall I alone be sober still?

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WANG CHI

2.

IN ABSENCE

At eve, I stand upon the bank and gaze;
Restless, I know not where my bark may rest;
I see the forest through the autumn haze;
I see the hills of radiance all divest;
I see the herdsman homing o'er the lea;
I see the huntsman's laden horse return.....
Alas, no loved one comes to beckon me!—
I sit and croon the thoughts that in me burn.

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WANG PIEH

A.D. 648–676.

[A precocious scholar, who began to compose at the age of six and took his degree at sixteen. Employed on the dynastic annals, be offended by denouncing the Emperor's fondness for cockfighting and was dismissed. Thereafter he occupied himself with getting drunk and writing poetry —in that order. He was drowned on his way to Cochin China to see his banished father.]

ICHABOD

Near these islands a palace was built by a prince,
But its music and song have departed long since;
The hill-mists of morning sweep down on the halls,
At night the red curtains lie furled on the walls.

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The clouds o'er the water their shadows still cast,
Things change like the stars: how few autumns have passed
And yet where is that prince? Where is he?
——No reply,
Save the splash of the stream rolling ceaselessly by.

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CH'ÊN TZŬ-ANG

A.D. 656–698.

[After a youth spent in hunting and gambling, he became an intimate adviser of the famous Empress Wu who appeared in the Council Chamber wearing a false beard and subsequently took the title of "God Almighty." Arrested on a trumped-up charge, he died in prison.]

1.

REGRETS

My eyes saw not the men of old;
And now their age away has rolled
I weep——to think I shall not see
The heroes of posterity!

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CH'ÊN TZŬ-ANG

2.

AGAINST IDOLS

On Self the Prophet* never rests his eye,
  His to relieve the doom of humankind;
No fairy palaces beyond the sky,
  Rewards to come, are present to his mind.
And I have heard the faith by Buddha taught
  Lauded as pure and free from earthly taint;
Why then these carved and graven idols, fraught
  With gold and silver, gems, and jade, and paint?

*This term includes the rulers under the Golden Age, Confucius, Mencius, and any other divinely-inspired teacher of the cardinal virtues.

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The heavens that roof this earth, mountain
and dale,
All that is great and grand shall pass
away;
And if the art of gods may not prevail,
Shall man's poor handiwork escape decay?
Fools that ye are! In this ignoble light
The true faith fades and passes out of sight.

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HO CHIH-CHANG

BORN A.D. 659.

[Poet and official who rose to be Director of the Imperial Library. He was one of the Eight Immortals of the Winecup, and the Emperor called him Devil Ho. Once, when drunk, he fell into a dry well and was found snoring at the bottom.]

THE RETURN

Bowed down with age I seek my native place,
Unchanged my speech, my hair is silvered now;
My very children do not know my face,
But smiling ask, "O stranger, whence art thou?"

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SUNG CHIH-WÊN

DIED A.D. 710.

[A brilliant poet who had a disreputable career as an official. He was ultimately forced to commit suicide.]

1.

A VISION

The dust of the morn had been laid by a shower,
And the trees by the bridge were all covered with flower,
When a white palfrey passed with a saddle of gold,
And a damsel as fair as the fairest of old.

But she veiled so discreetly her charms from my eyes
That the boy who was with her quite felt for my sighs;
And although not a light-o'-love reckoned, I deem,
It was hard that this vision should pass like a dream.*

*Set to music by Cyril Scott.

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SUNG CHIH-WÊN

2.

"THIS GENTLEMAN" *

There, on the banks of a verdant pool,
with leaves of selfsame hue
And all its slender grace of form,
he reared the tall bamboo.

But time sped on; phoenix came
the precious fruit to taste;
For far from haunts of man they soar
across the mountain's waste.†

And so, still young, with eager heart
he fled the vulgar crowd,
Back to the hills true joys to find
in every fleecy cloud.

And then, while silently he sat
and nursed his conscious pride,
Not for a day "this gentleman"
was absent from his side.

*A name given to the bamboo by Wang Hui-chih (died A.D. 388), in whose memory this poem was written.
†Suggesting that Wang was unequal to official life.

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CHANG CHIU-LING

A.D. 673–740.

[Statesman and poet; one of the first officials of the newly-instituted Han-lin College. On an Imperial birthday, when others presented costly articles, he offered only a collection of wise precepts.]

1.

BY MOONLIGHT

Over the sea the round moon rises bright,
And floods the horizon with its silver light.
In absence lovers grieve that nights should be,
But all the livelong night I think of thee.
I blow my lamp out to enjoy this rest,
And shake the gathering dewdrop from my vest.
Alas! I cannot share with thee these beams,
So lay me down to seek thee in my dreams.

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CHANG CHIU-LING

2.

AN ABSENT HUSBAND.*

Since my lord left—ah me, unhappy hour!—
The half-spun web hangs idly in my bower;
My heart is like the full moon, full of pains,
Save that 'tis always full and never wanes.

*See *Hsü Kan.*

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MÊNG HAO-JAN

A.D. 689–740.

[After failing at the public Examinations, he retired to the mountains and led the life of a hermit, producing poetry of the first order.]

1.

WAITING

The sun has sunk behind the western hill,
And darkness glides across the vale below;
Between the firs the moon shines cold and chill,
No breezes whisper to the streamlet's flow.
Belated woodsmen homeward hurry past,
Birds seek their evening refuge in the tree:
O my beloved, wilt thou come at last?
With lute, among the flowers, I wait for thee.*

*Set to music by Cyril Scott.

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2.

IN DREAMLAND

The sun has set behind the western slope,
The eastern moon lies mirrored in the pool;
With streaming hair my balcony I ope,
And stretch my limbs out to enjoy the cool.
Loaded with lotus-scent the breeze sweeps by,
Clear dripping drops from tall bamboos I hear,
I gaze upon my idle lute and sigh:
Alas no sympathetic soul is near!
And so I doze, the while before mine eyes
Dear friends of other days in dream-clad forms arise.

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3.

AT ANCHOR

I steer my boat to anchor
by the mist-clad river eyot,
And mourn the dying day that brings me
nearer to my fate.
Across the woodland wild I see
the sky lean on the trees,
While close to hand the mirrored moon
floats on the shining seas.

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LI SHIH-CHIH

DIED A.D. 747.

[A Minister of State and one of the Eight Immortals of the Wine-cup. Falling into disfavour, he committed suicide by poison.]

OUT OF OFFICE

For my betters —— my office resigned ——
I make way,
And seek with the wine-cup to shorten the day.
You ask for the friends who once thronged in my hall:
Alas! with my place they have gone, one and all.

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WANG WEI

A.D. 699–759.

[Famous as a poet and a painter; also, as a physician. His poems (like Livy's pages) were said to contain pictures, and his pictures to contain poems. After a brief official career, he went into seclusion.]

1.

OVERLOOKED

Beneath the bamboo grove, alone,
I seize my lute and sit and croon;
No ear to hear me, save mine own;
No eye to see me, save the moon.

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2.

GOODBYE

We parted at the gorge and cried "Good cheer!"
The sun was setting as I closed my door;
Methought, the spring will come again next year,
But he may come no more.

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3.

A RENCONTRE

Sir, from my dear old home you come,
  And all its glories you can name;
Oh tell me,—has the winter-plum
  Yet blossomed o'er the window-frame?

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4.

GOODBYE TO MÊNG HAO-JAN

Dismounted, o'er wine we had said our last say;
Then I whisper, "Dear friend, tell me whither away."
"Alas!" he replied, "I am sick of life's ills
"And I long for repose on the slumbering hills.
"But oh seek not to pierce where my footsteps may stray:
"The white clouds will soothe me for ever and ay."

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TS'UI HAO

8TH CENTURY A.D.

[A poet, a wine-bibber, and a gambler.]

HOME LONGINGS

Here a mortal once sailed up to heaven on a crane,*
And the Yellow-Crane Kiosque will for ever remain;†
But the bird flew away and will come back no more,
Though the white clouds are there as the white clouds of yore.
Away to the east lie fair forests of trees,
From the flowers on the west comes a scent-laden breeze,
Yet my eyes daily turn to their far-away home,
Beyond the broad River, its waves, and its foam.

*See "Carpe Diem."

†It was standing until quite recently, though probably several times restored.

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LI PO

A.D. 705–762.

[Regarded by many as China's greatest poet, and popularly known as "The Banished Angel." He flourished at a dissolute Court, himself one of its most dissolute members. He was a founder of the drunken club called the Six Idlers of the Bamboo Brook, and also belonged to the Eight Immortals of the Wine-cup. He is said to have been drowned by leaning over the gunwale of a boat in a drunken effort to embrace the reflection of the moon.]

1.

TO A FIREFLY*

Rain cannot quench thy lantern's light,
Wind makes it shine more brightly bright;
Oh why not fly to heaven afar,
And twinkle near the moon — a star?

*An impromptu, at the age of ten.

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2.

AT PARTING

The river rolls crystal as clear as the sky,
To blend far away with the blue waves of ocean;
Man alone, when the hour of departure is nigh,
With the wine cup can soothe his emotion.
The birds of the valley sing loud in the sun,
Where the gibbons their vigils will shortly be keeping;
I thought that with tears I had long ago done,
But now I shall never cease weeping.

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3.

NIGHT THOUGHTS

I wake, and moonbeams play around my bed,
Glittering like hoar-frost to my wondering eyes;
Up towards the glorious moon I raise my head,
Then lay me down —— and thoughts of home arise.

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LI PO

4.

COMPANIONS

The birds have all flown to their roost in the tree,
The last cloud has just floated lazily by;
But we never tire of each other, not we,
As we sit there together —— the mountains and I.

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5.

FROM A BELVIDERE

With yellow leaves the hill is strown,
A young wife gazes o'er the scene,
The sky with grey clouds overthrown,
While autumn swoops upon the green.

See, Tartar troops mass on the plain;
Homeward our envoy hurries on;
When will her lord come back again?....
To find her youth and beauty gone!

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6.

FOR HER HUSBAND

Homeward, at dusk, the clanging rookery
wings its eager flight;
Then, chattering on the branches, all
are pairing for the night.
Plying her busy loom, a high-born
dame is sitting near,
And through the silken window-screen
their voices strike her ear.
She stops, and thinks of the absent spouse
she may never see again;
And late in the lonely hours of night
her tears flow down like rain.

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7.

"THE BEST OF LIFE IS BUT..."

What is life after all but a dream?
And why should such pother be made?
Better far to be tipsy, I deem,
And doze all day long in the shade.

When I wake and look out on the lawn,
I hear midst the flowers a bird sing;
I ask, "Is it evening or dawn?"
The mango-bird whistles, "'Tis spring."

Overpower'd with the beautiful sight,
Another full goblet I pour,
And would sing till the moon rises bright —
But soon I'm as drunk as before.

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8.

FAREWELL BY THE RIVER

The breeze blows the willow-scent in from the dell,
While Phyllis with bumpers would fain cheer us up;
Dear friends press around me to bid me farewell:
Goodbye! and goodbye! — and yet just one more cup....
I whisper, Thou'lt see this great stream flow away
Ere I cease to love as I love thee to-day!

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9.

GONE

At the Yellow-Crane pagoda,* where we
stopped to bid adieu,
The mists and flowers of April seemed
to wish good speed to you.
At the Emerald Isle, your lessening sail had
vanished from my eye,
And left me with the River, rolling onward
to the sky.

*See *Ts'ui Hao.*

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10.

NO INSPIRATION

The autumn breeze is blowing,
The autumn moon is glowing,
The falling leaves collect but to disperse.
The parson-crow flies here and there
with ever restless feet;
I think of you and wonder much
when you and I shall meet.....
Alas to-night I cannot pour my feelings
forth in verse!

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11.

GENERAL HSIEH AN

I anchor at the Newchew hill,
The autumn sky serene and still,
And watch the moon her crescent fill,
And vainly think on him by whom
this shore was made renowned.*
Though mine is no ungraceful lay,
He cannot hear the words I say,
And I must sail at break of day.....
And all this while the maple leaves
are fluttering to the ground.

*Referring to the meeting at this spot of the General (A.D. 320–385) with Yüan Hung, a distinguished scholar and statesman.

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12.

A SNAP-SHOT

A tortoise I see on a lotus-flower resting;
A bird 'mid the reeds and the rushes is nesting;
A light skiff propelled by some boatman's fair daughter,
Whose song dies away o'er the fast-flowing water.*

*Set to music by J. Alden Carpenter.

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13.

A FAREWELL

Where blue hills cross the northern sky,
  Beyond the moat which girds the town,
'Twas there we stopped to say Goodbye!
  And one white sail alone dropped down.
Your heart was full of wandering thought;
  For me,—my sun had set indeed;
To wave a last adieu we sought,
  Voiced for us by each whinnying steed!

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14.

BOYHOOD FANCIES*

In days gone by the moon appeared
to my still boyish eyes
Some bright jade plate or mirror from
the palace of the skies.
I used to see the Old Man's legs
and Cassias fair as gods can make
them,
I saw the White Hare pounding drugs,
and wondered who was there to take
them.

*Chinese fable says that the moon is inhabited by a huge toad which occasionally swallows it; hence eclipses. Also, that there are groves of cassia, and a hare visible to the naked eye, engaged in preparing the drug of immortality.

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Ah, how I watched the eclipsing Toad,
and marked the ravages it made,
And longed for him who slew the suns
and all the angels' fears allayed.†
Then when the days of waning came,
and scarce a silver streak remained,
I wept to lose my favourite thus,
and cruel grief my eyelids stained.

†The legendary archer, Hou I, who when a number of false suns appeared in the sky, to the great detriment of the crops, shot at and destroyed them with his arrows.

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15.

FROM THE PALACE

Cold dews of night the terrace crown,
And soak my stockings and my gown;
I'll step behind
The crystal blind,
And watch the autumn moon sink down.

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16.

THE POET

You ask what my soul does away in the sky,
I inwardly smile but I cannot reply;
Like the peach-blossom carried away by the stream,
I soar to a world of which you cannot dream.

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17.

TEARS

A fair girl draws the blind aside
And sadly sits with drooping head;
I see her burning tear-drops glide
But know not why those tears are shed.

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18.

A FAVOURITE*

Oh the joy of youth spent in a gold-fretted hall,
In the Crape-flower Pavilion, the fairest of all,
My tresses for headdress with gay garlands girt,
Carnations arranged o'er my jacket and skirt!
Then to wander away in the soft-scented air,
And return by the side of his Majesty's chair....
But the dance and the song will be o'er by and by,
And we shall dislimn like the rack in the sky.

*One of ten stanzas thrown off by the poet when tipsy and concealed behind a pink silk screen held up by two ladies of the seraglio.

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19.

IN EXILE

I drink deep draughts of Lan-ling wine
fragrant with borage made,
The liquid amber mantling up
in cups of costly jade.
My host insists on making me
as drunk as any sot,
Until I'm quite oblivious
of the exile's wretched lot.

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20.

ANTI-PUSSYFOOT

If God does not love wine,
  Why shines the wine-star* in the sky?
If Earth does not love wine,
  Her flowing wine-spring† should be dry.
And since unharmed these Powers combine
  To love the wine-cup, so will I.

*First mentioned in the 2nd Century A.D. A poet of the 8th Century said:

You cannot pour the wine-star's wine,
Nor eat the cassia of the moon.

†Mentioned several centuries B.C., and placed by Yen Shih-ku (died A.D. 645) in the province of Kansuh.

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21.

IN A MIRROR

My whitening hair would make a long long rope,
Yet could not fathom all my depth of woe;
Though how it comes within a mirror's scope
To sprinkle autumn frosts, I do not know.

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22.

LAST WORDS

An arbour of flowers
and a kettle of wine:
Alas! in the bowers
no companion is mine.

Then the moon sheds her rays
on my goblet and me,
And my shadow betrays
we're a party of three!

Though the moon cannot swallow
her share of the grog,
And my shadow must follow
wherever I jog,

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Yet their friendship I'll borrow
and gaily carouse,
And laugh away sorrow
while spring-time allows.

See the moon —— how she glances
response to my song;
See my shadow —— it dances
so lightly along!

While sober I feel,
you are both my good friends;
When drunken I reel,
our companionship ends,

But we'll soon have a greeting
without a goodbye,
At our next merry meeting
away in the sky.

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TU FU

A.D. 712–770.

[A poet whose fame rivalled—many say eclipsed—that of the great Li Po. He had indeed such a high opinion of his own poetry that he prescribed it for malarial fever. After serving without success as Censor, and secretary in the Board of Works, he resigned and took up a wandering life, finally dying from the effects of starvation during a flood, followed by over-indulgence in roast beef and white wine.]

1.

IN ABSENCE

White gleam the gulls across the darkling tide,
On the green hills the red flowers seem to burn;
Alas! I see another spring has died...
When will it come — the day of my return?

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2.

WINE

The setting sun shines low upon my door
Ere dusk enwraps the river fringed with spring;
Sweet perfumes rise from gardens by the shore,
And smoke, where crews their boats to anchor bring.
Now twittering birds are roosting in the bower,
And flying insects fill the air around...
O wine, who gave to thee thy subtle power? —
A thousand cares in one small goblet drowned!

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3.

TO HIS BROTHER

The evening drum has emptied every street,
One autumn goose screams on its frontier flight,
The crystal dew is glittering at my feet,
The moon sheds, as of old, her silvery light.

The brothers,—ah, where are they?
Scattered each;
No home whence one might learn the other's harms.
Letters have oft miscarried: shall they reach
Now when the land rings with the clash of arms?

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4.

A LANDSCAPE

Two orioles sit in the green willows singing;
See egrets in flight to the blue sky are winging!
From my window the snow-peaks eternal I spy,
And an ocean-bound vessel is anchored hard by.

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5.

HOME JOYS

My home is girdled by a limpid stream,
And there in summer days life's movements pause,
Save where some swallow flits from beam to beam,
And the wild sea-gull near and nearer draws.

The goodwife rules a paper board for chess;
The children beat a fish-hook out of wire;
My ailments call for physic more or less,
What else should this poor frame of mine require?

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6.

SSŬ-MA HSIANG-JU*

'Twas here, from sickness sore oppressed,
He found relief on Wên-chün's breast;
'Twas here the vulgar tavern lay
On mountain cloud-capped night and day.
And still mid flowers and leaves I trace
Her fluttering robe, her tender face;
But ah! the phoenix calls in vain,
Such mate shall not be seen again.

*A poet of the 2nd Century B.C. who eloped with a beautiful young widow and was driven to keep a tavern until the father-in-law relented.

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7.

THE HERMIT

Alone I wandered o'er the hills
to seek the hermit's den,
While sounds of chopping rang around
the forest's leafy glen.
I passed on ice across the brook
which had not ceased to freeze,
As the slanting rays of afternoon
shot sparkling through the trees.

I found he did not joy to gloat
o'er fetid wealth by night,
But far from taint, to watch the deer
in the golden morning light....
My mind was clear at coming;
but now I've lost my guide,
And rudderless my little bark
is drifting with the tide!*

*Hinting that he is now contemplating a hermit's life himself.

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8.

SUPERSEDED

Alas for the lonely plant that grows
beside the river bed,
While the mango-bird screams loud and long
from the tall tree overhead!
Full with the freshets of the spring,
the torrent rushes on;
The ferry-boat swings idly, for
the ferryman is gone.*

*A specimen of political allegory. The "lonely plant" refers to a virtuous statesman for whom the time is out of joint, like Lord Rosebery and his "lonely furrow." The "mango-bird" is a worthless politician in power. The "ferry-boat" is our ship of State.

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9.

SOLO CHI SEGUE CIÒ CHE PIACE É SAGGIO

A petal falls! — the spring begins to fail,
And my heart saddens with the growing gale.
Come then, ere autumn spoils bestrew the ground,
Do not forget to pass the wine-cup round.
Kingfishers build where man once laughed elate,
And now stone dragons guard his graveyard gate!
Who follows pleasure, he alone is wise;
Why waste our life in deeds of high emprise?

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10.

DUM RES ET AETAS

From the court every eve to the pawnshop I pass,
To come back from the river the drunkest of men;
As often as not I'm in debt for my glass; —
Well, few of us live to be threescore and ten.
The butterfly flutters from flower to flower,
The dragon-fly sips and springs lightly away,
Each creature is merry its brief little hour,
So let us enjoy our short life while we may.

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11.

A PICNIC

The sun is setting as we loose the boat,
And lightly o'er the breeze-swept waters
float.
We seek a corner where the bamboo grows,
And fragrant lilies offer cool repose.
Here well-iced draughts of wine the men
prepare,
With lotus shredded fine by fingers fair....
But now a black cloud gathering in the sky
Warns me to finish off my verse and fly.*

*Set to music by Cyril Scott.

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12.

THE PRESSGANG

There, where at eve I sought a bed,
A pressgang came, recruits to hunt;
Over the wall the goodman sped,
And left his wife to bear the brunt.

Ah me! the cruel serjeant's rage!
Ah me! how sadly she anon
Told all her story's mournful page,—
How three sons to the war had gone;

How one had sent a line to say
That two had been in battle slain:
He, from the fight had run away,
But they could ne'er come back again.

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She swore 'twas all the family—
  Except a grandson at the breast;
His mother too was there, but she
  Was all in rags and tatters drest.

The crone with age was troubled sore,
  But for herself she'd not think twice
To journey to the seat of war
  And help to cook the soldiers' rice.

The night wore on and stopped her talk;
  Then sobs upon my hearing fell....
At dawn when I set forth to walk,
  Only the goodman cried Farewell!

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CH'ANG CHIEN

8TH CENTURY A.D.

[A poet who in 727 took the highest degree and entered into official life, but ultimately retired to the mountains as a hermit.]

DHYÂNA*

The clear dawn creeps into the convent old,
The rising sun tips its tall trees with gold,—
As, darkly, by a winding path I reach
Dhyâna's hall, hidden midst fir and beech.
Around these hills sweet birds their pleasure take,
Man's heart as free from shadows as this lake;
Here wordly sounds are hushed, as by a spell,
Save for the booming of the altar bell.

*A state of mental abstraction, by recourse to which the Buddhist gradually shakes off all desire for sublunary existence. In every monastery there is a hall in which priests may be seen sitting for hours together with their eyes closed.

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HSÜ HSÜAN-P'ING

8TH CENTURY A.D.

[A singular being, who in 708 retired to the mountains and tried to live without eating, but not without drinking, as the following verse of which he himself was the woodman-hero will show. The poet, Li Po, tried to find him, but without success.]

"BACCHE, PLENUM TUI"

In the morning my woodman will sell his load,
And he'll buy his wine on his homeward road.
You ask where the home of my pedlar lies....
The home of that man is in Paradise!

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CHIA CHIH

A.D. 718–772.

[Poet and statesman with a chequered career.]

SPRING SORROWS

The willow sprays are yellow fringed,
the grass is gaily green;
Peach-blooms in wild confusion with
the perfumed plum are seen;
The eastern breeze sweeps past me,
yet my sorrows never go,
And the lengthening days of spring to me
mean lengthening days of woe.

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WEI YING-WU

8TH CENTURY A.D.

[In early life a soldier; later, after a course of study he entered upon a civil career. His poetry has been described as "simple in expression, pregnant with meaning."]

1.

AN ABSENT HUSBAND

The oriole trills its little lay,
Orchids around in wild array,
What time the wife, immured behind,
Sees sunlight pierce the muslin blind.
Her lovely eyebrows, mothlike made,
Her parted lips, her teeth of jade....
She sighs to think that peach and plum
Bloom while her hero may not come;
Since parting, time has sadly fled:
Is he indeed alive or dead?

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2.

SPRING JOYS

When freshets cease in early spring
and the river dwindles low,
I take my staff and wander
by the banks where wild flowers grow.
I watch the willow-catkins
wildly whirled on every side;
I watch the falling peach-bloom
lightly floating down the tide.

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3.

REMEMBRANCES

In autumn, when the nights are chill,
I stroll, and croon, and think of thee.
When dropping pine-cones strew the hill,
Say, hast thou waking dreams of me?

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4.

A PROMISE

Sweet flowers were blooming all around
when your last farewell you said,
And now the opening buds
proclaim another year has fled.
'Tis difficult to prophesy
beyond the present day,
And the remedy for trouble
is to sleep it all away.
I suffer much in body,
and I long for the old spot,
But cannot bring myself
in pensioned idleness to rot.
You say that you will visit me,
that you are coming soon:
'Twixt now and then how often shall
I see the full-orbed moon?

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HSÜ AN-CHÊN

8TH CENTURY A.D.

[An official who took the highest degree and was on intimate terms with the famous Emperor Ming Huang, whose literary draughts were always examined by him.]

MY NEIGHBOUR

When the Bear athwart was lying
And the night was just on dying,
And the moon was all but gone,
How my thoughts did ramble on!

Then a sound of music breaks
From a lute that some one wakes,
And I know that it is she,
The sweet maid next door to me.

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And as the strains steal o'er me
Her moth-eyebrows* rise before me,
And I feel a gentle thrill
That her fingers must be chill.

But doors and locks between us
So effectually screen us
That I hasten from the street
And in dreamland pray to meet.

*Referring to the delicately curved eye-markings of the silkworm moth.

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TS'ÊN TS'AN

8TH CENTURY A.D.

[Took the highest degree about the year 750, and rose to be a Censor.]

IN PRAISE OF BUDDHISM

A shrine, whose eaves in far-off cloudland hide:
I mount, and with the sun stand side by side.

The air is clear; I see wide forests spread
And mist-crowned heights where Kings of old lie dead.

Scarce o'er my threshold peeps the Southern Hill;
The Wei shrinks through my window to a rill....
O thou Pure Faith, had I but known thy scope,
The Golden God had long since been my hope!

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KÊNG WEI

8TH CENTURY A.D.

[An official and poet who took the highest degree in 762, and was one of the Ten Men of Genius of his day. Two of his lines have become proverbial:

Hireling respect with loss of fortune ends,
and loss of influence means loss of friends.]

LONELY

The evening sun slants o'er the village
street;
My griefs alas! in solitude are borne;
Along the road no wayfarers I meet,—
Naught but the autumn breeze across
the corn.

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LIU CH'ANG-CH'ING

8TH CENTURY A.D.

[Took the highest degree in the year 757, and rose to be a Censor and Judge.]

THE WASHERWOMAN'S GRAVE*

The hero ne'er forgot the meal she gave,—
My tale is of a thousand years ago,—
And every woodsman knows the time-worn grave,
Though naught remains of dynasties save the river's ceaseless flow.

With votive flower the traveller is seen,
The while the grief-bird† trills his mournful lays;

*The great General of the 2nd Century B.C., Han Hsin, was saved from starving by a kindly washerwoman. Later on he remembered and provided for his benefactress.
†The goatsucker or nightjar.

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Around, the grass of spring grows wildly
green
Where footprints of the "nobleman"‡
were left in bygone days.

‡As the washerwoman called Han Hsin, by a presentiment of his future greatness.

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KA CHIA-YÜN

8TH CENTURY A.D.

[A Commissioner of Revenue about A.D. 725, who presented to the Emperor the stanza given below, though apparently not claiming it as his own composition.]

AT DAWN

Drive the young orioles away,
Nor let them on the branches play;
Their chirping breaks my slumber through
And keeps me from my dreams of you.

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CHANG WEI

8TH CENTURY A.D.

[A poet who took the highest degree in 743 and rose to be President of the Board of Rites.]

NOSTALGIA

'Tis autumn, and I watch the streams
  Which towards my dear home flow;
I span the distance in my dreams,
  And wake to deeper woe.

I cannot read to ease my care,
  But solace seek in wine,
And think of friends all gathered there —
  When will that lot be mine?

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WANG CH'ANG-LING

8TH CENTURY A.D.

[A poet who took the highest degree and entered official life. He was killed in a rebellion.]

1.

AT THE WARS

See the young wife whose bosom ne'er
has ached with cruel pain! —
In gay array she mounts the tower
when spring comes round again.
Sudden she sees the willow-trees
their newest green put on,
And sighs for her husband far away
in search of glory gone.

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2.

A MESSAGE

Onwards tonight my storm-beat course I steer,
At dawn these mountains will for ever fade;
Should those I leave behind enquire my cheer,
Tell them, "an icy heart in vase of jade."

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HUANG-FU JÊN

8TH CENTURY A.D.

[Took the highest degree about the year 750 and entered official life. His poetry, which he began to write at the age of ten, was much admired by Chang Chiu-ling.]

SPRETÆ INJURIA FORMÆ

See! fair girls are flocking through
corridors bright,
With music and mirth borne along on
the breeze.....
Come, tell me if she who is favoured
tonight
Has eyebrows much longer than these?

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TSU YUNG

8TH CENTURY A.D.

[An official who took the highest degree about the year 730, and rose to be a Secretary in the Board of Rites. His poetry is much admired.]

A GROTTO

Deep in a darksome grove their Grotto lies,
And deep the thoughts that now within me rise.
Fronting the door the South Hill looming near,
The forest mirrored in the river clear,
The bamboo bends beneath last winter's snow,
The court-yard darkens ere the day sinks low.
I seem to pass beyond this world of clay,
And sit and listen to the spring-bird's lay.

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TS'UI HU

8TH OR 9TH CENTURY A.D.

[A poet of whom I can find no record.]

A RETROSPECT

Oh this day last year what a party were we
Pink cheeks and pink peach-blossoms smiled upon me;
But alas the pink cheeks are now far far away,
Though the peach-blossoms smile as they smiled on that day.

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LIU T'ING-CHIH

CIRCA A.D. 800.

[A poet of whom I can find no record.]

"YOUTH AT THE PROW"

Beneath the bridge spring freshets hurry by;
Above, there passes many a cavalier;
The sound of trampling horses fills the sky,
And mirrored forms are dancing on the mere.

Beneath green waves the mud-banks turn to jade,
The setting sun paints the blue clouds with gold;
Alas, ye willow trees, for sorrow made!*
Alas, ye peach and plum, for grief enrolled!†

*Referring to the custom of giving a spray of willow at parting.

†There is a very old belief in China that the decay of a plum-tree is due to maggots from a peach-tree growing alongside.

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Now is the time to seek the blooming fair,
Now is the hour to join the dance and song;
See how the lovely girls flit here and there,
Among the noble youths in lordly throng!

The pearl-sewn blind glints in the sunshine clear,
Pink cheeks make contrast with complexion blond;
Among the flowers two butterflies career,
I see two love-birds paddling in the pond.

I think of her whose glance could wreck a State,‡
Of her whose lover came in mist and rain.§
Ah! beauty as of yore makes man elate,
And I to-day feel the old thrill again.

‡"One glance from her would overthrow a city, a second a State,"—so beautiful was she—was said by the brother of Lady Li, his sister and concubine to the Emperor Wu Ti, 140–86 B.C.

§This refers to a dream by a Prince of Ch'u of the Goddess of Clouds and Rain who received him on Mt. Wu in Ssŭch'uan.

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Oh, could I be the zone that clasps thy
waist!—
Thy mirror, that thy beauty I might share!
Together always, by thy presence graced,
A single being, a united pair.

Oh, could we be some pure, some long-lived
pine,
Unconscious of the life each spring renewed,
Each eve to watch the westering sun incline,
For ever happy in our solitude!

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CH'ÜAN TE-YÜ

A.D. 759–818.

[Scholar and statesman. It is recorded that he began to write verse at four years of age.]

HOPE

Last eve thou wert a bride,
  This morn thy dream is o'er.....
Cast not thy rouge aside,
  He may be thine once more.

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HAN YÜ (HAN WÊN-KUNG)

A.D. 768–824.

[One of China's greatest statesmen, who also occupies a foremost place as a writer and is popularly known as the Prince of Literature. For his prose works, including his attack upon Buddhism, see *Gems of Chinese Literature*, 2nd Edition.]

1.

THE WOUNDED FALCON

Within a ditch beyond my wall
I saw a falcon headlong fall.
Bedaubed with mud and racked with pain,
It beat its wings to rise, in vain;
While little boys threw tiles and stones,
Eager to break the wretch's bones.
O bird, methinks thy life of late
Hath amply justified this fate!
Thy sole delight to kill and steal,
And then exultingly to wheel,

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Now sailing in the clear blue sky,
Now on the wild gale sweeping by,
Scorning thy kind of less degree
As all unfit to mate with thee.
  But mark how fortune's wheel goes round;
A pellet lays thee on the ground,
Sore stricken at some vital part,—
And where is then thy pride of heart?
  What's this to me? — I could not bear
To see the fallen one lying there.
I begged its life, and from the brook
Water to wash its wounds I took.
Fed it with bits of fish by day,
At night from foxes kept away.
My care I knew would naught avail
For gratitude, that empty tale.
And so this bird would crouch and hide
Till want its stimulus applied;
And I, with no reward to hope,
Allowed its callousness full scope.

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Last eve the bird showed signs of rage,
With health renewed, and beat its cage.
Today it forced a passage through,
And took its leave, without adieu.

Good luck hath saved thee, not desert;
Beware, O bird, of further hurt;
Beware the archer's deadly tools! —
'Tis hard to escape the shafts of fools —
Nor e'er forget the chastening ditch
That found thee poor, and left thee rich.*

*In experience of the vicissitudes of life.

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2.

HOURS OF IDLENESS

A little lake of mine I know,
Where waving weeds and rushes grow,
And in its depths by day and night
The water-monsters swarm and fight.
Ah, how I loved to idle there!. . . .
But now I can no longer bear
To pass my days in that sweet spot,
And lost in meditation rot.
A sense of duty gives me pause,
Obedient to my Master's* laws;
Our span of life is all too short
To waste its hours in empty sport.

*Confucius, in whose Temple the tablet of Han Yü was placed in the year 1084.

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3.

IN CAMP

Across the steppes the bitter north winds roam,
At dawn the Tartar moon shines cold and bright;
My soul relapses into dreams of home,
Till the loud rappel summons to the fight.

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4.

MEDITATIONS

The leaves fall fluttering from the trees,
And now, responsive to the breeze,
Rustling with weird uncanny sound,
Are dancing merrily around.
On my lone hall the dusk has come
And there I sit in silence dumb.
My servant glides into the room
And with a lamp dispels the gloom.
He speaks; I give him no reply.
He proffers food; in vain. Then I
Move to escape his wondering looks
And seek a refuge in my books.
Alas, the men who charm me so
Perished a thousand years ago!
And while I muse o'er human fate
My heart grows less and less elate. . .
"O boy, whose eyes stare from your head,
"Put up those books and get to bed,
"And leave me to the dreary naught
"Of endless, overwhelming thought."

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5.

DISCONTENT

To stand upon the river-bank
and snare the purple fish,
My net well cast across the stream,
was all that I could wish.
Or lie concealed and shoot the geese
that scream and pass apace,
And pay my rent and taxes with
the profits of the chase.
Then home to peace and happiness,
with wife and children gay,
Though clothes be coarse and fare be hard,
and earned from day to day.
But now I read and read, scarce knowing
what 'tis all about,

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And eager to improve my mind
I wear my body out.
I draw a snake and give it legs,
to find I've wasted skill,
And my hair grows daily whiter
as I hurry towards the hill.*
I sit amid the sorrows
I have brought on my own head,
And find myself estranged from all,
among the living dead.
I seek to drown my consciousness
in wine, alas! in vain:
Oblivion passes quickly
and my griefs begin again.
Old age comes on and yet withholds
the summons to depart. . . .
So I'll take another bumper
just to ease my aching heart.

*The Chinese prefer hillsides for their burying-grounds.

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6.

HUMANITY

Oh spare the busy morning fly!
  Spare the mosquitos of the night!
And if their wicked trade they ply
  Let a partition stop their flight.

Their span is brief from birth to death;
  Like you they bite their little day;
And then, with autumn's earliest breath,
  Like you too they are swept away.

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LI HO

A.D. 791–817.

[A poet and military official who was noted for his small waist, joined eyebrows, long finger-nails, and for the speed at which he could write. He began to compose poems at the age of seven.]

NEAERA'S TANGLES

With flowers on the ground like embroidery spread,
At twenty, the soft glow of wine in my head,
My white courser's bit-tassels motionless gleam
While the gold-threaded willow scent sweeps o'er the stream.
Yet until *she* has smiled all these flowers yield no ray;
When her tresses fall down, the whole landscape is gay;
My hand on her sleeve as I gaze in her eyes,
A kingfisher hairpin* will soon be my prize.

*Inlaid with kingfisher feathers, and much affected by the *demi-mondaine*.

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LIU YÜ-HSI

A.D. 772–842.

[A statesman with a chequered career of banishment and success, and also a poet who was such a purist that he left a beautiful piece unfinished because it was necessary to use the word *dumplings*, which was not to be found in the Confucian Canon. Po Chü-i called him a Hero of Song.]

1.

SUMMER DYING

Whence comes the autumn's whistling blast,
With flocks of wild geese hurrying past?..
Alas, when wintry breezes burst,
The lonely traveller hears them first!

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LIU YÜ-HSI

2.

THE ODALISQUE

A gaily dressed damsel steps forth from her bower,
Bewailing the fate that forbids her to roam;
In the courtyard she counts up the buds on each flower,*
While a dragon-fly flutters and sits on her comb.†

*Having nothing better to do. The dragon-fly on the comb strikes a note of loneliness.
†Set to music by J. A. Carpenter.

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MU TSUNG (LI HÊNG)

A.D. 795–824.

[Written by the twelfth Emperor of the T'ang dynasty, while still Heir Apparent. To the end of his life, which he brought to a premature close by a fatal dose of the elixir of immortality, he remained always a puppet in the hands of his eunuchs.]

EUNUCH DOMINATION

Autumnal weeds sprout on my royal way*
Though summer blossoms still the branches sway.
My crowding thoughts I hold within my breast,
Safe from the prying eyes of eunuch quest.

*So long is it since the prince has cared to drive out in his chariot.

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PO CHÜ-I

A.D. 772–846.

[One of China's greatest and most voluminous poets, and a successful statesman, with the usual ups and downs. He was a very precocious child, and took the highest degree at the early age of seventeen.]

1.

"THE GAY LICENTIOUS CROWD"

With haughty mien they fill the ways,
And gorgeous gleam their saddletrees;
I ask, who are they? Someone says,
The Court officials these.

Scarlet-sashed ministers are there,
Red-tasselled generals in crowds;
Their minds are bent on sumptuous fare;
Their steeds pass by like clouds.

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Wine of the rarest brands they take;
Rich meats are set before their eyes,—
An orange from the Tung-t'ing lake,
And fish from Paradise.

Serenely full, their greed assuaged,
Half-drunken, and still happier then....
That year a cruel famine raged,
And men were eating men.

2.

THE TAO TÊ CHING

"Who know, speak not; who speak, know naught"
Are words from Lao Tzŭ's lore.
If Lao Tzŭ knew, why did he speak
"Five thousand words and more?"*

*The number of characters in the *Tao Tê Ching*, from which line 1 is quoted. See *Gems of Chinese Literature*, 2nd edition, under Lao Tzŭ.

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3.

"Elle était du monde où les plus belles choses Ont le pire destin"

'Tis of a gentle maiden I would speak;
Her eyes like willow-leaves, and pink her cheek.
Two years ago, her glass first played its part;
One year ago, she learned the 'broidering art.
Then, at thirteen accomplishments complete,
Ready was she her destiny to meet.
Like flowers her jewelled tresses crowned her head,
A wind-borne fragrance from her person shed;

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Her face, her form, alike beyond compare,
Glowing at every turn with radiance rare.
But frosts, that peach and plum untimely blight,
Touched, and she fell, her wedding day in sight.

. . . . .

Father and mother, lay your grief aside;
She was not fashioned for a mortal's bride—
An angel, banished from her place of birth,
Condemned to spend a few short years on earth.
The loveliest things are of the frailest make;
Like clouds they vanish, and like glass they break.

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4.

"I CAN'T GET OUT!"

To me, from distant climes, a parrot came;
And as time passed his beak grew all
aflame.
I clipped his wings, dreading a homesick
mood,
And oped the cage but slightly for his food.

We grew to love him for his clever jeers;
But birds have other aims in other spheres;
And without freedom, this poor bird would
seem,
Like a caged beauty in some rich hareem.

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5.

"VINA LIQUES"

Come bring me a bumper
and fill it up fair,
Ere the flowers have all fallen
and the trees are all bare;
Nor imagine that thirty
still leaves a long run;
If you live to a hundred,
one-third of it's done.

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6.

TO A LOST CRANE

With snow the inner court was white;
The sea-breeze aided in thy flight.
Hast met some sky-borne pal of thine?—
Away three nights without a sign.

Faint from the clouds thy voice was heard;
Thy shadow in the moonbeams blurred.
My home is bare! Ah, if not thou,
Who'll be the old man's comrade now?

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PO CHÜ-I

7.

SIC VOS NON VOBIS

My taste for the banquet is long ago o'er;
The guitar and the winecup delight me no more;
But my friends and my servants all have a good time. . . .
'Twould appear 'tis for them that to fortune I climb.

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8.

I. A BIRTH

At last, at fifty-eight I have a boy;
But sighs are mingled with my notes of joy.
We blame the single pearl the oyster grows;
Yet no one wants a quiverful of crows.

Late autumn sees the cassia's fruitful bough;
Spring winds the purple orchids stir—and now
I raise my glass and breathe my heart's desire,—
Oh, be not such a fool as was thy sire!

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II. A DEATH

O precious pearl, O much-loved little boy,
Of me, thy graybeard sire, sole hope and joy,
A shade thou art, ere life has yet begun,
And I remain to mourn a hapless son.

My heart is cut in twain, but not with steel;
My eyes are swollen, but not with dust;—I feel
My arms are empty: God has willed it so;
A childless man I linger here below.

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9.

"MULTA DECEDENTES ADIMUNT"

Alas! I'm sixty-six to-day;
How short life is doth now appear.
I grieve to see men pass away,
But joy to think I still am here.

We cannot always boast black heads,
Nor eyes with fiery youth alive;
Tall trees surround my friends' last beds,*
My grooms will see my grandsons thrive.

I'm thin, my back with stiffness bound;
I'm weak, the snows my locks have caught;
What cure for growing old is found,
Save refuge in the Halls of Naught?†

*So long have they been buried.
†In Buddhism.

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10.

"SWEET AUBURN"

Far from the ken of worldly eyes,
Nestling in trees, a village lies.
There, mid the loom's incessant sound,
Oxen and asses tramp around;
Young girls draw water from the rills;
Young men bring fuel from the hills.
Foul litigation never sears
The pure life of these mountaineers;
Their wealth is not by commerce earned;
To war their youths have never turned;
Each works out his appointed task;
Old age is left at home to bask.
In life, mere peasants they remain;
In death, to village dust again.

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The youths and elders you may see
Meet in the fields with joyous glee;
One village 'tis, with but two clans;
Enough indeed for marriage banns.
Their forbears boast the selfsame stock;
They roam afield, a single flock.
Fat capons and good wine appear
On festive days throughout the year.
No cruel partings blight their lives;
From neighbours near they seek their wives.
No distance parts them when they die;
Around the hamlet's side they lie;
And thus in life and death at peace,
Their health and spirits never cease;
Old age is theirs; they live to see
Their great great grandson's progeny!

. . . . .

Born in a cultured family,
An orphan soon, in poverty,

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The Right I sought by midnight oil,
With no result save bitter toil.
The world, in name, towards goodness strives,
But what men want is "place" and wives,
Thus forging fetters for their necks,
And ending miserable wrecks.
At ten, the Books I read and learned;
At fifteen, prose and verses turned;
At twenty, baccalaureate;
At thirty, joined the Censorate.
At home, the thrall of wife and child;
At Court, although the Emperor smiled,
The statesman's toil, domestic care,
O'erwhelmed me, more than I could bear.
I think of all my journeys done,
While fifteen years away have run;
Whether by boat I steered my course,
Or ambled on a weary horse.
Hunger was oft my lot by day;

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The livelong night I restless lay;
Now east, now west, no stop allowed;
Hither and thither, like a cloud.
Rebellion came, my home was lost;
My relatives, all tempest-tost,
Scattered, some north, some south, were seen,
And the Great River flowed between.
Of some, I never heard again;
Of others, in a year or twain.
From morn to eve I sat in grief;
From eve to morn, still no relief.
Scorched with these fires my heart is dead;
Sorrow has blanched my troubled head;
And now, amid this stress and strife,
My spirit longs for village life.

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11.

DESERTED

Soaked is her kerchief through with tears,
yet slumber will not come;
In the deep dead of night she hears
the song and beat of drum.*

Alas, although his love has gone,
her beauty lingers yet;
Sadly she sits till early dawn,
but never can forget.

*The revels in which she once played the leading part.

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YÜAN CHÊN

A.D. 779–831.

[An official who rose through a chequered career to the highest posts of State. His poems were great favourites with the ladies of the Imperial seraglio.]

1.

AT AN OLD PALACE

Deserted now the Imperial bowers
Save by some few poor lonely flowers . . .
One white-haired dame,
An Emperor's flame,
Sits down and tells of bygone hours.

Digitized by Google

YÜAN CHÊN

2.

TAKING ORDERS

Talk not of hills and streams to him
who once has seen the sea;
The clouds that mantle Wu's peak are
the only clouds for me.

Though convent walls must always be
my lot until the end,
And half my heart must be with God,
the rest is with my friend.

Digitized by Google

LI I

DIED CIRCA A.D. 827.

[An official and poet whose poems were at one time sung all over the empire.]

A CAST-OFF FAVOURITE

The dewdrops gleam on bright spring flowers
whose scent is borne along;
Beneath the moon the palace rings
with sounds of lute and song.
It seems that the clepsydra*
has been filled up with the sea,
To make the long long night appear
an endless night to me!

*Water-clocks were known to the Chinese at a very early date, and are still to be found in China.

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SSŬ-K'UNG SHU

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[Poet and official. One of the Ten Men of Genius of his day.]

OH STAY!

We shall meet, I believe you, again;
  Yet to part!—such a beautiful night....
Shall friendship and wine ask in vain
  What a head-wind would take as its
right?

Digitized by Google

CHU CH'ING-YÜ

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[Took the highest degree in 827, but failed as an official and retired.]

IN THE HAREM

It was the time of flowers, the gate was closed;
Within an arbour's shade fair girls reposed.
But though their hearts were full, they nothing said,
Fearing the tell-tale parrot overhead.

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KU K'UANG

8TH AND 9TH CENTURIES A.D.

[A distinguished poet of the day, who finally went into retirement as a hermit.]

AT A GRAVE

An old man lays to rest a much-loved
son. . .
By day and night his tears of blood will
run,
Albeit when threescore years and ten have
fled,
'Tis not a long farewell that he has said.*

*The authorities of the Infernal Regions were so touched by the above that they allowed his son to be born again into the family.

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CHANG CHI

8TH AND 9TH CENTURIES A.D.

[A scholar and poet who rose to be a Secretary in the Board of Works. He was a vigorous opponent of Buddhism and Taoism, both of which he held in contempt.]

THE CHASTE WIFE'S REPLY

Knowing, fair sir, my matrimonial thrall,
Two pearls thou sentest me, costly withal.
And I, seeing that Love thy heart possessed,
I wrapped them coldly in my silken vest.

For mine is a household of high degree,
My husband captain in the King's army;
And one with wit like thine should say,
"The troth of wives is for ever and ay."

With thy two pearls I send thee back
two tears:
Tears——that we did not meet in earlier
years!

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YANG CHÜ-YÜAN

8TH AND 9TH CENTURIES A.D.

[A poet who took the highest degree about the year 790, and rose to be a Director of Education in 830.]

1.

TASTE

The landscape which the poet loves
is that of early May,
When budding greenness half concealed
enwraps each willow spray.
That beautiful embroidery
the days of summer yield,
Appeals to every bumpkin
who may take his walks afield.*

*Set to music by Cyril Scott.

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2.

A GLIMPSE

The buds of the peach were just blossoming out,
And swallows in couples were skimming about,
When a beautiful damsel, of ravishing mien,
Diffusing the odour of spring-time is seen.

She toys with the mirror which lies by her side,
Then blushes to note that the casement is wide;
For she knows that the traveller passing that way
Will joy in the fragrance he carries away.

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TU MU

A.D. 803–852.

[A poet and painter. He took the highest degree in 830 and rose to be a Secretary in the Grand Council. Often spoken of as the Younger Tu, to distinguish him from Tu Fu.]

1.

A LOST LOVE*

Too late, alas!.... I came to find
the lovely spring had fled.
Yet must I not regret the days
of youth that now are dead;
For though the rosy buds of spring
the cruel winds have laid,
Behold the clustering fruit that hangs
beneath the leafy shade!†

*When ordered to a distant post, he said to his *fiancée*, "Within ten years I shall be Governor. If I do not return by then, marry whomsoever you please." He came back after fourteen years to find her married and the mother of three children.

†Set to music by Cyril Scott.

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2.

THE OLD PLACE

A wilderness alone remains,
all garden glories gone;
The river runs unheeded by,
weeds grow unheeded on.
Dusk comes, the east wind blows, and birds
pipe forth a mournful sound;
Petals, like nymphs from balconies,
come tumbling to the ground.

3.

THE LAST NIGHT

Old love would seem as though not love
to-day;
Spell-bound by thee, my laughter dies away.
The very wax sheds sympathetic tears
And gutters sadly down till dawn appears.

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4.

LOVERS PARTED

Across the screen the autumn moon
stares coldly from the sky;
With silken fan I sit and flick
the fireflies sailing by.
The night grows colder every hour,—
it chills me to the heart
To watch the Spinning Damsel
from the Herdboy far apart.*

*Referring to the stars α Lyrae and α β, γ Aquilæ, respectively, which are separated by the Milky Way except on the 7th night of the 7th moon, when magpies form a bridge for the Damsel to pass over to her lover.

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LI SHANG-YIN

A.D. 813–858.

[A scholar and poet who took the highest degree in 837, and rose to be an officer in the Han-lin College.]

1.

THE NIGHT COMES

'Tis evening, and in restless vein
At the old mount I slacken rein:
The glorious day
Fades fast away
And naught but twilight glooms remain!

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2.

SOUVENIRS

You ask when I'm coming: alas, not just yet.....
How the rain filled the pools on that night when we met!
Ah, when shall we ever snuff candles again,
And recall the glad hours of that evening of rain?

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SHAO YEH

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[A scholar of whom nothing in particular is recorded, except that the threat by a Magistrate of bambooing caused him to turn his attention to books.]

TIME'S HAVOC

I take a glance, and shake my head;
Another look; my beauty's fled.
My suns and moons like water run;
A moment, and my day is done.

But yesterday my cheeks were red,
And now white locks hang round my head.
Red cheeks, white locks,—see how time
flies—
What little space between them lies!

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LIU CHIA

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[Of whom I can find no record.]

WITH WINE AND FLOWERS

One day while I tipsily snoozed in my
bower,
The sun disappearing had darkened the
land;
My guests had all left me for many an hour;
The cup and the wine-jar lay strewn on
the sand....
I could not recall I had picked me a flower,
Yet I woke up to find I had one in my
hand.

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LIU SHANG

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[A painter of landscape and portraits who wrote the following lines in despair at the banishment of his master. The latter, in addition to being a very distinguished artist, could paint, as Sir Edwin Landseer after him, two pictures at once with two separate brushes.]

A LAMENT

The lichen grows thick on the stones in the brook,
And the breeze stirs the boughs of the pines by the shore....
Ah, Chang Tsao alone could interpret this book,
But now he is gone and we see him no more.

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CHANG YEN

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[A scholar who took the highest degree in the year 872.]

1.

A SPRING FEAST

The paddy crops are waxing rich
upon the Goose-Lake hill;
The fowls have just now gone to roost,
the grunting pigs are still;
The mulberry casts a lengthening shade—
the festival is o'er,
And tipsy revellers are helped
each to his cottage door.

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2.

"FILL THE BUMPER FAIR"

All joys are poor to sober glance,
  True joys to wine belong—
When every step we take is dance,
  And every word is song.

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LI SHÊ

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[A poet noted for having fallen into the hands of brigands who were great admirers of his verse, and who bade him at once compose a poem for them. Hence the lines below, on seeing which the brigands laughed and set him free.]

1.

ON HIGHWAYMEN

The rainy mist sweeps gently
o'er the village by the stream,
When from the leafy forest glades
the brigand daggers gleam..
And yet there is no need to fear
or step from out their way,
For more than half the world consists
of bigger rogues than they!*

*Set to music by J. A. Carpenter.

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2.

SPRING PASSES

Waking from mingled dreams and fumes
of a long-drawn drunken bout,
I heard that spring was dying fast
and forthwith hied me out.
I passed the Bamboo Garden
where the old priest hailed me stay
And then with "All is vanity"
we whiled the hours away.

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WANG CHIA

9TH AND 10TH CENTURIES A.D.

[A poet and official who took the highest degree in 890 and rose to be a Secretary in the Board of Rites. He gave himself the sobriquet of Simplicitarian.]

A STORM

No rain, and lovely flowers bloom around;
Rain falls, and battered petals strew the ground.
The bees and butterflies flit, one and all,
To seek the spring beyond my neighbour's wall.

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CHU SHU-CHÊN

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[A poetess, and a descendant of Han Yü (*q.v.*).]

1.

SUMMER BEGINS

What time the bamboo casts a deeper shade,
When birds fill up the afternoon with song,
When catkins vanish, and when pear-blooms fade,—
Then man is weary and the day is long.

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2.

"ROUGH WINDS DO SHAKE THE DARLING BUDS OF MAY"

The lattice-like sprays had scarce burst into bloom,
Ere the storm in its envy accomplished their doom....
Ah, would that the Spring-God might evermore reign,
No dotting the sward with these petals again.

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CHAO CHIA

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[An official who took the highest degree in 842, and whose poems gained praise from Tu Mu.]

WHERE ARE THEY?

Alone I mount to the kiosque which stands
on the river-bank, and sigh,
While the moonbeams dance on the tops
of the waves
where the waters touch the sky;
For the lovely scene is to last year's scene
as like as like can be,
All but the friends, the much-loved friends,
who gazed at the moon with me.*

*Set to music by Cyril Scott.

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TAI SHU-LUN

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[Distinguished as a poet and an official. Under his rule the gaols were empty, as "in Alfred's golden reign."]

NEW YEAR'S EVE AT AN INN

Here in this inn no friend is nigh;
We sit alone, my lamp and I,
A thousand miles from love and smiles,
To see another year pass by.

Ah me, that ever I was born!
Is life worth living, thus forlorn?
Youth, beauty, pass; and yet alas
It will be spring tomorrow morn.

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HSIEH JUNG

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[No record to be found.]

MUSING

At eve, along, the river bank,
The mist-crowned wavelets lure me on
To think how all antiquity
Has floated down the stream and gone!

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MA TZŬ-JAN

DIED A.D. 880.

[A man who possessed a wide knowledge of simples and was in great request as a doctor. He is said to have been taken up to the Taoist heaven alive.]

UT MELIUS

In youth I went to study TAO*
at its living fountain-head,
And then lay tipsy half the day
upon a gilded bed.
"What oaf is this," the Master cried,
"content with human lot?"
And bade me to the world get back
and call myself a Sot.

*Here the Way of Lao Tzŭ.

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But wherefore seek immortal life
by means of wondrous pills?
Noise is not in the market-place,†
nor quiet on the hills.
The secret of perpetual youth
is already known to me:
Accept with philosophic calm
whatever fate may be.

†"Who carry music in their heart
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart."—*Keble.*

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CH'IN T'AO-YÜ

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[No record that I can find.]

THE SEMPSTRESS

In silk and satin ne'er arrayed,
My fate to be a lone old maid;
No handsome bridgroom comes for me
Dressed in the garb of poverty.
I learned to sew with skill and grace,
Though not to paint my brows and face,
Yet I must ply my golden thread
For other maids about to wed.

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TS'UI T'U

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[No record that I can find.]

THE TRAVELLER

The stream glides by, the flower fades,
and neither feels a sting
That thus they pass and bear away
the glory of the spring.
I dream myself once more at home,
a thousand miles away;
The night-jar wakes me with its cry
ere yet 'tis early day.
Long months have passed and no word comes
to tell me of my own;
With each New Year my scattered locks
have white and whiter grown,
Ah, my dear home, if once within
thy threshold I could be,
The Five Lakes and their lovely scenes
might all go hang for me.

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TU CH'IU-NIANG

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[A poetess, who when fifteen years old became concubine to an official, and afterwards passed into the Palace where she was appointed by the Emperor in 820 to be Instructess to the Heir Apparent. When the Heir Apparent was deposed, she was allowed to return home.]

GOLDEN SANDS

I would not have thee grudge those robes
which gleam in rich array,
But I would have thee grudge the hours
of youth which glide away.
Go pluck the blooming flower betimes,
lest when thou com'st again
Alas, upon the withered stem
no blooming flowers remain!

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LI CH'ANG-FU

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[No record that I can find.]

WANDERJAHRE

Roused from the fumes of wine, I hear
the drum,
Midst thoughts of home, roll from the
distant tower,
While through the trees faint streaks of
daylight come,
And the spring passes in a pattering
shower.

The tired bird homeward wings its way
at last;
Flowers fade and die beneath wild winds
oppressed.
What have my wanderings earned these
ten years past?....
My wayworn horse is sick of east and
west.

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LI TUAN

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[No record that I can find.]

MUSIC HATH CHARMS

Hark to the rapturous melody!
  Her white arm o'er the lute she flings....
To break her lover's reverie
  She strikes a discord on the strings.

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LI CHIA-YU

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[No record that I can find.]

IN RETIREMENT

He envies none, the pure and proud
ex-Minister of State;
On the Western Lake he shuts himself
within his bamboo gate.
He needs no fan to cool his brow, for
the south wind never lulls,
While idly his official hat lies
staring at the gulls.

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LIU FANG-P'ING

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[No record that I can find.]

THE SPINSTER

Dim twilight throws a deeper shade
across the window-screen;
Alone within a gilded hall
her tear-drops flow unseen.
No sound the lonely court-yard stirs;
the spring is all but through;
Around the pear-blooms fade and fall....
and no one comes to woo.

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CHI P'O

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[No record that I can find.]

THOUGHTS BY MOONLIGHT

Bright in the void the mirror moon*
appears,
To the hushed music of the heavenly
spheres,
Full orbed, while autumn wealth beneath
her lies,
On her eternal journey through the skies.
Oh may we ever walk within the light
Nor lose the true path in the eclipse of night!
Oh let us mount where rays of glory beam
And purge our grossness in the Silver
Stream!†

*Referring to the polished discs of metal anciently used as mirrors by the Chinese.

†The Milky Way.

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HAN WU

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[An official who took the highest degree and served under the Emperor Chao Tsung. He disappeared from the scene after the *coup d'état* of 904.]

CONTEMPLATION

When my court-yard by the placid moon
is lit,
When around me leaves come dropping
from the trees,
On the terrace steps, contemplative, I sit,
The swing-ropes swaying idly in the
breeze.

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ANONYMOUS

9TH CENTURY A.D.

VIEW FROM AN OLD TOWER

The story of a thousand years
In one brief morning lies unrolled;
Though other voices greet the ears,
'Tis still the moonlit tower of old.

The heroes of those thousand years?
Alas! like running water, gone;
Yet still the fever-blast one hears,
And still the plum-rain patters on.

'Twas here ambition marched sublime —
An empty fame scarce marks the spot;
Away!.... for I will never climb
To see flowers bloom and man forgot.

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LI PIN

9TH CENTURY A.D.

[An official who took the highest degree in 853 and held various posts through very troubled times.]

HOMEWARD

No letters to the frontier come,
  The winter softens into spring. . . . .
I tremble as I draw near home,
  And dare not ask what news you bring.

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CH'ÊN T'AO

9TH AND 10TH CENTURIES A.D.

[A poet and astronomer, who lived in retirement on the hills with his wife, also a scholar, and grew oranges for a livelihood.]

AN OATH

They swore the Huns should perish:
they would die if needs they must....
And now five thousand, sable-clad,
have bit the Tartar dust.

Along the river-bank their bones
lie scattered where they may,
But still their forms in dreams arise
to fair ones far away.

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WANG HAN

10TH CENTURY A.D.

[Noted for having taken out his right eye to replace one of his mother's eyes, in both of which she had gone blind. The operation is said to have been successful.]

A REASON FAIR

'Tis night: the grape-juice mantles high
in cups of gold galore;
We set to drink,——but now the bugle
sounds to horse once more.
Oh marvel not if drunken we
lie strewed about the plain;
How few of all who seek the fight
shall e'er come back again!

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CH'EN PO

10TH CENTURY A.D.

[A strange being who, when four or five years old, was suckled by a lady wearing dark clothes, whom he met when playing by the riverside; after which he became extraordinarily enlightened. His enlightenment took the form of devotion to Taoism, research for the elixir of life, for transmutation of metals, etc., but it did not help him to take the highest degree, for which he was a candidate in 932.]

DISILLUSIONED

For ten long years I plodded through
the vale of lust and strife,
Then through my dreams there flashed a ray
of the old sweet peaceful life...
No scarlet-tasselled hat of state
can vie with soft repose;
Grand mansions do not taste the joys
that the poor man's cabin knows.

Digitized by Google

I hate the threatening clash of arms
when fierce retainers throng,
I loathe the drunkard's revels and
the sound of fife and song;
But I love to seek a quiet nook, and
some old volume bring
Where I can see the wild flowers bloom
and hear the birds in spring.

Digitized by Google

CHANG PI

11TH CENTURY A.D.

[An official who took the highest degree about 1045 and rose to be President of the Board of Punishments.]

TO AN ABSENT FAIR ONE

After parting, dreams possessed me
and I wandered you know where,
And we sat in the verandah
and you sang the sweet old air.
Then I woke, with no one near me
save the moon still shining on,
And lighting up dead petals
which like you have passed and gone.

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YANG I

A.D. 974–1030.

[Author and statesman, who at birth was covered with hair a foot long, which however disappeared within a month. He took the highest degree, and was employed upon the dynastic annals. For some years he could not speak; at length, being carried one day to the top of a pagoda, he burst out with the lines given below.]

'TWIXT HEAVEN AND EARTH

Upon this tall pagoda's peak
  My hands can nigh the stars enclose;
I dare not raise my voice to speak,
  For fear of startling God's repose.

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OU-YANG HSIU

A.D. 1007–1072.

[Historian, statesman, and voluminous writer on many subjects (see *Gems of Chinese Literature*), he came out first at the examination for the highest degree and rose to be President of the Board of War.]

CONSOLATION

The balmy breath of spring must fail
to reach that distant spot
Where early wild-flowers do not bloom
to cheer my exile's lot.
See how the oranges still hang
amid the clinging snow,
And shoots and buds, benumbed by cold,
around reluctant grow!
At night your heart is with your home
when you hear the wild goose cry,
And your sadness ever deepens
as the smiling months go by.

Digitized by Google

Yet when you think of happy hours
at Loyang in the past,
Grieve not that spring is late, but joy
that spring is yours at last.

Digitized by Google

SHAO YUNG

A.D. 1011–1077.

[One of the most famous of the classical scholars of China, whose tablet stands in the Confucian Temple. For many years he denied himself a stove in winter and a fan in summer, travelling far and wide in China to increase his knowledge by contact with men of learning. Always poor, he was made comfortable towards the end of his life by the generosity of friends.]

1.

"THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU"

The heavens are still: no sound.
Where then shall God be found?
Search not in distant skies;
In man's own heart He lies.

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2.

A STRUGGLE

Fair flowers from above in my goblet are shining,
And add by reflection an infinite zest;
Through two generations I've lived, unrepining,
While four mighty rulers have sunk to their rest.
My body in health has done nothing to spite me,
And sweet are the moments which pass o'er my head;
But now, with this wine and these flowers to delight me,
How shall I keep sober and get home to bed?

Digitized by Google

SSŬ-MA KUANG

A.D. 1019–1086.

[A statesman who took the highest degree and rose to be a Minister of State. He resigned, however, in order to devote himself to his famous work, known as the "Mirror of History," which covered a period from the 5th Century B.C. to the 10th Century A.D.]

WAITING

'Tis the festival of Yellow Plums!
the rain unceasing pours,
And croaking bullfrogs hoarsely wake
the echoes out of doors.
I sit and wait for him in vain,
while midnight hours go by,
And push about the chessmen
till the lamp-wick sinks to die.

Digitized by Google

HUANG T'ING-CHIEN

A.D. 1042–1102.

[An official who took the highest degree and rose to be a Grand Secretary. He is one of the twenty-four examples of Filial Piety and was ranked as one of the Four Great Scholars of the empire.]

ANNUAL WORSHIP AT TOMBS

The peach and plum trees smile with flowers
this famous day of spring,
And country graveyards round about
with lamentations ring.
Thunder has startled insect life
and roused the gnats and bees,
A gentle rain has urged the crops
and soothed the flowers and trees....
Perhaps on this side lie the bones
of a wretch whom no one knows;
On that, the sacred ashes
of a patriot repose.

Digitized by Google

But who across the centuries
can hope to mark each spot
Where fool or hero, joined in death,
beneath the brambles rot?

Digitized by Google

WANG AN-SHIH

A.D. 1021–1086.

[A famous statesman who introduced a number of reforms into the economic, military, and educational systems of China. The reactionaries were, however, too strong for him, and he lived to see all his policy reversed.]

1.

A WHITE NIGHT

The incense-stick is burnt to ash,
the water-clock is stilled,
The midnight breeze blows sharply by
and all around is chilled.

Yet I am kept from slumber
by the beauty of the spring:
Sweet shapes of flowers across the blind
the quivering moonbeams fling!

Digitized by Google

2.

WHY LATE?

I stayed indeed too long ——
to count the fallen flowers
And search for fragrant blooms ——
I took no note of hours*

*Too late I stayed; forgive the crime,
Unheeded flew the hours;
How noiseless falls the foot of time
That only treads on flowers!
W. R. Spencer.

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CH'ENG HAO

A.D. 1032–1085.

[One of two famous brothers, both of whom took the highest degree and whose tablets were admitted in 1241, as representing orthodox scholars, into the Confucian Temple.]

1.

INSOUCIANCE

I wander north, I wander south,
I rest me where I please....
See how the river-banks are nipped
beneath the autumn breeze!
Yet what care I if autumn blasts
the river-banks lay bare?
The loss of hue to river-banks
is the river-banks' affair.*

*Set to music by Cyril Scott.

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2.

SPRING FANCIES

When clouds are thin, and the wind is light,
about the noontide hour,
I cross the stream, through willow paths
with all around in flower.
The world knows not my inmost thoughts
which make me seem a fool;
I'm taken for a truant boy
escaped from tedious school.

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KUO HSIANG-CHÊNG

11TH CENTURY A.D.

[A poet whose mother, before his birth, had dreamed of the great Li Po (*q.v.*), and of whom, for his poetical skill, he was afterwards declared to be a re-incarnation.]

"SPLENDIDIOR VITRO"

Men come and go, but thou art there;
  Men hurry by, there thou art still;
No fish nor thirsty bird to break
  The image of yon verdant hill.

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TS'AI CH'O

11TH CENTURY A.D.

[A statesman who rose to high rank but was banished in 1087. His son, P'i-pa, who accompanied him, and whose name had become familar to a favourite parrot, soon died; upon which the father seized a pen and wrote the lines given below.]

A DEAD BOY

The parrot calls him as of yore,
Though P'i-pa's earthly days are o'er.
Together to this distant shore
We crossed—but shall return no more.

MUSIC

Paper screen, bamboo couch, and a stone for my pillow; —
I doze, and the book from my dreamy grasp slips;
Then the note of a fisherman's flute o'er the billow
Awakes me from sleep with a smile on my lips.

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SU SHIH (SU TUNG-P'O)

A.D. 1036–1101.

[Statesman who suffered banishment more than once. In 1057 he took the highest degree, coming out second on the list. As a *littérateur* he is in the very first rank. See *Gems of Chinese Literature*.]

1.

SPRING NIGHTS

One half-hour of a night in spring
is worth a thousand taels,
When the clear sweet scent of flowers is felt
and the moon her lustre pales;
When mellowed sounds of song and flute
are borne along the breeze,
And through the stilly scene the swing
sounds swishing from the trees.

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2.

WHIGS AND TORIES

Thickly o'er the jasper terrace
flower-shadows play;
In vain I call my garden boy
to sweep them all away.
They vanish when the sun sets
in the west, but very soon
They spring to giddy life again
beneath the rising moon!*

*The "flower-shadows" stand for evil politicians who held their own against the brooms of virtuous statesmen, but disappeared at the death of a misguided Emperor, to re-appear at the death of his successor.

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HUNG CHÜEH-FAN

11TH AND 12TH CENTURIES A.D.

[Distinguished as a poet and a calligraphist. He finally took orders as a Buddhist priest, and produced several well-known works.]

SWINGING*

Two green silk ropes, with painted stand,
from heights aerial swing,
And there outside the house a maid
disports herself in spring.
Along the ground her blood-red skirts
all swiftly swishing fly,
As though to bear her off to be
an angel in the sky.

*Chinese girls swing standing up on the seat.

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Strewed thick with fluttering almond-blooms
the painted stand is seen;
The embroidered ropes flit to and fro
amid the willow green.
Then when she stops and out she springs
to stand with downcast eyes,
You think she *is* some angel
just now banished from the skies.

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TAI FU-KU

12TH AND 13TH CENTURIES A.D.

[A poet, without further occupation, who spent twenty years in travelling about to places of interest.]

SUMMER

When ducklings seek the puddles, mostly
dry,
In the hot plum-time, with its changeful
sky,
'Tis then in shady arbour we carouse,
And strip the golden loquat from the
boughs.

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YEH SHIH

A.D. 1150–1223.

[A statesman who came out second on the list for the highest degree, and in 1206 began a series of important military operations against the Golden Tartars.]

AT A PARK GATE

'Tis closed!——lest trampling footsteps
mar the glory of the green.
Time after time we knock and knock;
no janitor is seen.
Yet bolts and bars can't quite shut in the
spring-time's beauteous pall;
A pink-flowered almond-spray peeps out
athwart the envious wall!

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WANG FENG-YÜAN

12TH CENTURY A.D.

[No record that I can find.]

THE THIRD MOON

In May flowers fade, and others come
to bloom among the leaves,
While all day long the nesting swallow
flits around the eaves.
The night-jar cries half through the night
until the blood flows fast,
Ah vainly hoping to recall the
spring that now is past!

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LU YU

A.D. 1125–1209.

[A statesman with a varied career, and a skilled *littérateur*. He was employed upon the dynastic history, and his poetry was much admired. He spoke of himself as "Old *Laisser-Aller*."]

TO WINE

Soft as the spring-time, as the autumn sweet,
One stoup of thee, at night, all joys will yield;
Demons of care fall harmless at my feet,
Therefore I say, Be thou my spear and shield!

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LIU CHI-SUN

CIRCA A.D. 1200.

[A poor scholar, who left behind him at death a library of 30,000 volumes and a collection of many hundred pictures. This is his only known poem; it was picked up and carried off by a visitor to his mountain refuge, who failed to find him at home.]

A HERMIT

Ye swallows twittering among the beams,
Why thus intrusive break upon my dreams?
Dreams vague with fancies that I cannot
plain.....
With staff and flask I seek the hills again.

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KAO CHÜ-NIEN

12TH CENTURY A.D.

[No record that I can find.]

WORSHIP, AND AFTER*

The northern and the southern hills
are one large burying-ground,
And all is life and bustle there
when the sacred day comes round.
Burnt paper *cash*, like butterflies,
fly fluttering far and wide,
While mourners' robes with tears of blood
a crimson hue are dyed.
The sun sets, and the red fox crouches
down beside the tomb;
Night comes, and youths and maidens laugh
where lamps light up the gloom.

*Referring to the annual spring worship at the tombs of ancestors.

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Let him, whose fortune brings him wine,
get tipsy while he may;
For no man, when the long night comes,
can take one drop away!

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YANG CHIEN

12TH AND 13TH CENTURIES A.D.

[A poet and official who gained such a reputation as a Magistrate that the people called him Father Yang.]

TOO LATE AGAIN

This year I swore I would enjoy the sweets
of spring enow:
Alas! spring breezes died away ere yet I
quite knew how.
'Tis hard to note the beauties of the
landscape slipping by,
When sorrow and when fell disease,
alternate, dim the eye.

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TS'AO PIN

13TH CENTURY A.D.

[A distinguished scholar and statesman, who rose to high office and was known as one of the Four Censors of the Chia Hsi period, A.D. 1237–1241.]

A SPRING EVENING

Now no one takes heed of the flowers that have dropped,
And dark is the landscape's predominant note;
The oriole's song in the forest has stopped,
And the only sound heard is the frog in the moat.

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HSIEH FANG-TÊ

A.D. 1226–1289.

[An official who took the highest degree about 1253. He got into trouble when holding the post of Examiner by setting an unpopular theme and was degraded. He then became an itinerant fortune-teller, and finally starved himself to death.]

AT HIS CLUB

Long past midnight the wife hears
the goatsucker's cry,
And rises to see that the
silkworms are fed;
Alas! there's the moon shining
low in the sky,
But her husband has not yet
come back to his bed.

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YEH LI

A.D. 1241–1292.

[A statesman who played an important part in the later years of transition from Chinese to Mongol rule.]

AT HIS BOOKS

Shadows of pairing sparrows cross his
book,
Of poplar catkins, dropping overhead...
The weary student from his window-nook
Looks up to find that spring has long
since fled.

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LIU CHI

A.D. 1311–1375.

[A poet and official who helped the first Emperor of the Ming dynasty to expel the Mongols, but later on fell into disfavour and was poisoned.]

1.

AT A MOUNTAIN MONASTERY

I mounted when the cock had just begun,
And reached the convent ere the bells
were done.
A gentle zephyr whispered o'er the lawn;
Behind the wood the moon gave way to
dawn.
And in this pure sweet solitude I lay,
Stretching my limbs out to await the day,
No sound along the willow pathway dim
Save the soft echo of the bonzes' hymn.

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2.

OMNES EODEM

A centenarian 'mongst men
Is rare; and if one comes, what then?
The mightiest heroes of the past
Upon the hillside sleep at last.

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HSIEH CHIN

A.D. 1369–1415.

[A scholar and statesman who was on very intimate terms with the first two Emperors of the Ming dynasty, and under whose presidency the enormous encyclopaedia, mostly destroyed during the Boxer trouble, was ultimately produced. Falling into disfavour, he was thrown into prison and four years later was made drunk and was buried under a heap of snow.]

1.

AN EMPEROR IN A SNOWSTORM

The snowflakes fall thickly on every side,
And unstained by the mud they lie lightly about.
God knows that his Majesty's gone for a ride,
So a carpet of flowers* for his steed is laid out.

*"Flowers" takes the place of "flakes" in Chinese.

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2.

A SNOW PRIEST

This priest is not of woman born,
  But straight from heaven descended;
And back he'll go tomorrow morn,
  When his short stay is ended.

3.

APOLOGIA

In vain hands bent on sacrifice
  or clasped in prayer we see;
The ways of God are not exactly
  what those ways should be.

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The swindler and the ruffian
lead pleasant lives enough,
While judgments overtake the good
and many a sharp rebuff.
The swaggering bully stalks along
as blithely as you please,
While those who never miss their prayers
are martyrs to disease.
And if great God Almighty fails
to keep the balance true,
What can we hope that paltry mortal
magistrates will do?

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LIN HUNG-CHUNG

15TH CENTURY A.D.

[A poet who declined office on the ground that he could not leave his aged mother. He was killed by rebels because he refused to kneel to them.]

A MOUNTAIN BROOK

One draught for my poetic soul I take,
Unconscious river, ere thou glid'st away
To serve the orgies of the Western Lake,
And be no more the pure stream of to-day.

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CHAO TS'AI-CHI

15TH CENTURY A.D.

[A courtesan-poetess.]

TO HER LOVER

The tide in the river beginning to rise,
Near the sad hour of parting, brings tears
to our eyes;
Alas that these furlongs of willow-strings
gay
Cannot hold fast the boat that will soon
be away!

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ANONYMOUS

15TH CENTURY A.D.

Do not forget your cotton days
When robed in cloth of gold;
Among new friends who crowd around,
Do not forget the old!

ANONYMOUS

15TH CENTURY A.D.

A BROKEN TRYST

"Meet me," said I, "at the rise of the moon."
The moon duly rose, but in vain did I wait;
For I live on the plain, where the moon rises soon,
And he among hills, where the moon rises late.

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SHIH TSUN (CHU HOU-TSUNG)

A.D. 1507–1566.

[Eleventh Emperor of the Ming dynasty, and a worthless ruler. His north-west frontiers were raided, the Japanese harried the coast provinces, and a Portuguese envoy, who had reached Peking in 1520, was sent back to Canton where he died in prison. Meanwhile, his Majesty was engaged in searching for an elixir of life.]

TO GENERAL MAO*

Southward, in all the panoply
of cruel war arrayed,
See, Our heroic general points
and waves his glittering blade!
Across the hills and streams
the lizard-drums† terrific roll,
While glint of myriad banners
flashes high from pole to pole....
Go, scion of the Unicorn,
and prove thy heavenly birth,

*He crushed a serious revolt in Annam, 1539–1541.
†Covered with lizard-skin.

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And crush to all eternity
these insects of the earth;
And when thou com'st, a conqueror,
from those wild barbarian lands,
We will unhitch thy war-cloak
with Our own Imperial hands!

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CHAO LI-HUA

16TH CENTURY A.D.

[A courtesan-poetess.]

TO AN ABSENT LOVER

Your notes on paper rare to see,
  Two flying joy-birds bear;
Be like the birds and fly to me,
  Not like the paper —— rare*

*Chinese note-paper is prettily covered with pictures of various design, mostly symbolical.

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SSŬ-K'UNG SHAN

(?) 16TH CENTURY A.D.

[The following lines are from the *Chih yüeh lu*, published in A.D. 1602 by Ch'u Ju-chi.]

TO A BUDDHIST PRIEST

Seeing the Way,* a follower I would be;
How can I follow what I do not see?
The Way itself is unsubstantial air;
How can I follow that which is not there?
Those who to walk along the Way aspire,
Are seeking water-bubbles in a fire.
'Tis just like "Punch and Judy"† and its fun;
If the strings break, the little play is done.

*Here, of course, the Buddhist Way, Mârga; not to be confused with the Way (*Tao*) either of Lao Tzŭ or of Confucius.

†A favourite diversion of the Chinese for many centuries past.

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HSÜ WEI

16TH CENTURY A.D.

[A very brilliant young man who had an unfortunate career. His patron being thrown into prison, he went mad and attempted to commit suicide, and killed his second wife. He was distinguished as a calligraphist, a writer of prose and verse, and as an artist.]

ON A WINE-JAR IN AN OLD GRAVE

My thoughts are with the owner, far away,
Who had a goblet, but who could not quaff;
A hare-shaped* piece of common yellow clay,
Sole friend for a millennium and a half.

But here beside him rests a legal deed†
For ground where now in winding-sheet he lies;
'Tis clear that long ere death his soul had freed
He had no lack of fortune's choice supplies ——

*The hare is an auspicious animal. There is one in the moon, pounding drugs for the elixir of immortality.

†The amount mentioned is 4,000,000 *cash*, whatever that might mean at such a remote date.

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Vessels of jade, all exquisitely wrought,
And silken robes with these upon a par ——
By what spell were his dainty fingers taught
To raise to lips refined this earthen jar?

'Twixt quick and dead a grave-mound—a
mere thing;
Yet joy and silence seem so far apart.
A living rat's more worth than a dead
king:
A fact we'll all do well to lay to heart.

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P'U SUNG-LING

BORN A.D. 1622.

[A scholar who failed disastrously at the public examinations, but who ultimately produced one of the greatest masterpieces in style to be found in the Chinese language. See *Gems of Chinese Literature.*]

INWARD LIGHT

With wine and flowers we chase the hours,
In one eternal spring;
No moon, no light, to cheer the night,
Thyself that ray must bring.

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FANG SHU-SHAO

DIED A.D. 1642.

[A poet and calligraphist, who led a very harum-scarum life until 1642, when he had "something wrong with his teeth" (probably *pyorrhoea*). He got into his coffin, wrote the above valedictory, and died.]

TO HIS COFFIN

An eternal home awaits me,
shall I hesitate to go?
Or struggle for a few more hours
of fleeting life below?
A home, wherein the clash of arms
I can never hear again!
And shall I strive to linger
in this thorny world of pain?
The breeze will soon blow cool o'er me,
and the bright moon shine o'erhead
When blended with the gems of earth
I lie in my last bed.

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My pen and ink shall go with me
inside my funeral hearse,
So that if I've leisure "over there"
I may soothe my soul with verse.

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ANONYMOUS

18TH CENTURY A.D.

AN AGNOSTIC

You ask me why I greet the priest
But not his God;
The God sits mute, the man at least
Returns my nod.

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CHANG WÊN-T'AO

18TH CENTURY A.D.

[A poetess who wrote the following lines after reading the work on the duties of women by Pan Chao, the female historian of the 1st Century A.D.]

ADVICE TO GIRLS

Trust not spring clouds, trust not to flowers:
  The butterfly is caught;
Oh snatch no passing joy in hours
  Of pleasure wrongly sought!
A mien severe and eyes that freeze
  Become the future bride;
No whispering underneath the trees
  Ere yet the knot be tied.
'Tis heaven on earth when woman wed
  Leans on her husband's arm;
Beauty, like flowers, is quickly shed:
  Oh envy not its charm!

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ANONYMOUS

18TH CENTURY A.D.

INTEGER VITÆ

Riches and rank — a morning dream in
spring;
Fame — but an unsubstantial cloud above;
Thy very body is not thine for ay;
Hate is the end of love.

Fix not a golden collar on thy neck;
Be not with chain of jade in service bound;
Pure heart and few desires: earth's dust
shake off —
And happiness is found.

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YÜAN MEI

A.D. 1715–1797.

[Poet, essayist, letter-writer, and for a few years an official. Among other works, he produced a famous cookery-book, which is as well known in China as *La Physiologie du Goût* in Europe. See *Gems of Chinese Literature*.]

A SCOFFER

I've ever thought it passing odd
How all men reverence some God,
And wear their lives out for his sake
And bow their heads until they ache.
'Tis clear to me the Gods are made
Of the same stuff as wind or shade....
Ah, if they came to every caller,
I'd be the very loudest bawler!

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LU CHU-CH'I

18TH CENTURY A.D.

[A poet who, when found lying drunk in the road, made the following reply to the Prefect; adding that his condition was his own business and not the Prefect's.]

AN IMPROMPTU

Though the torrent be swift, it can ne'er
carry off
the moonbeam that lights up its bed;
Though the mountain be high, yet it
cannot arrest
the fast-flying cloud overhead.

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THE EMPEROR CH'IEN LUNG

A.D. 1710–1799.

[One of the two great literary rulers of the Manchu dynasty, for whose achievements, see *Gems of Chinese Literature*. He was an ardent writer of verse, and produced about 34,000 short poems, after Wordsworth in his lowliest moods. In 1793 he received Lord Macartney.]

1.

BEST OF ALL THINGS IS WATER

Searching among the mountain streams,
against this spring we ran;
Pure as a saint and placid too,
as any Perfect Man.*
The Hangchow hyson,† world renowned,
is good as good can be....
We gather pine-sticks for a fire
and brew a cup of tea.

*The Confucian ideal.

†A kind of green tea. The name is a corruption of two Chinese words meaning "glorious spring"—the season, not the fountain.

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2.

UP NORTH

The season was a month behind
in this land of northern breeze,
When first I heard the harsh cicadæ
shrieking through the trees.
I looked but could not mark its form
amid the foliage fair;
Naught but a flash of shadow which
went flitting here and there.

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CHAO I

A.D. 1727–1814.

[A poet, historian, and official, who came out first at the examination for the second degree but was placed second by the Emperor in order to encourage candidates from another province. In 1810 he attended his Jubilee (60th year) banquet as graduate.]

THE DIVINEST OF ALL THINGS

Man is indeed of heavenly birth,
Though seeming earthy of the earth;
The sky is but a denser pall
Of the thin air that covers all.
Just as this air, so is that sky;
Why call this low, and call that high?

The dewdrop sparkles in the cup —
Note how the eager flowers spring up;
Confine and crib them in a room,
They fade and find an early doom.
So 'tis that at our very feet
The earth and the empyrean meet.

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The babe at birth points heavenward too,
Enveloped by the eternal blue;
As fishes in the water bide,
So heaven surrounds on every side;
Yet men sin on, because they say
Great God in heaven is far away.

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FANG WEI-I

19TH CENTURY A.D.

[A young and disconsolate widow who, after the death of her young husband, shaved her head and became a Buddhist nun.]

PARTINGS

'Tis common talk how partings sadden life:
  There are no partings for us after death.
But let that pass; I, now no more a wife,
  Will face Fate's issues to my latest
breath.*

The north wind whistles through the
mulberry-grove,
  Daily and nightly making moan for me;
I look up to the shifting sky above,
  No little prattler smiling on my knee.

*Rejecting the alternative of suicide, regarded formerly as an honourable exit for a youthful widow.

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Life's sweetest boon is after all to die....
My weeping parents still are loth to yield;
Yet east and west the callow fledglings fly,
And autumn's herbage wanders far
afield.

What will life bring to me an I should
stay?
What will death bring to me an I should
go?
These thoughts surge through me in the
light of day,
And make me conscious that at last I
know.

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CH'IU CHIN

DIED A.D. 1907.

[A young married woman who in 1904 left her husband, and after a period of study in Japan, devoted herself to forwarding the revolutionary movement against the Manchu dynasty. She was arrested and executed, leaving behind her a small volume of verse and the honorific title "Woman-knight of the Mirror Lake."]

ENLIGHTENMENT

When through my casement dawn appears
  And early breezes stroke my cheek,
'Mid endless crowding hopes and fears
  I bow my head, I cannot speak.
I long to mount the wind and fly ——
  The far horizon seems too near;
But why seek God in distant sky?
  Knock, and His doors are opened here!

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HSIEH WEI-NUNG

PRESENT DAY.

[From Nanking, at the close of the T'ai-p'ing rebellion, all the golden glories of the Southern Dynasties—4th, 5th, and 6th Centuries A.D.—had been completely wiped out. When Tsêng Kuo-fan had recovered the city (in 1864), he set to work to replant flowers and trees. Then once more it became possible to pass through a splendour of peach-blossoms, and to enjoy the beauty of the river, with its bevies of pink-cheeked damsels as of old, and the music of flute and guitar. *Reprinted by permission from* THE TIMES *of 4 September, 1918.*]

RETURN OF THE *GENIUS LOCI*

Towards the White Gate I am bent,
Led by love of flowers and scent....
Now I linger at the door
Where we quaffed our wine of yore....
Now I see old scenes arise,
Taking shape before my eyes,
And with brush I limn the blaze
Of gay flowers amid the haze....
Now a friend or two I bring,

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And we're off to seek the spring....
Once again I cross the ridge
Of the famous Red Rail bridge;
But alack-a-day, alas!
All the willows which we pass,
Lately set, have sprung to life
Since those days of bloody strife....
Now we haste to get afloat,
Tea and wine aboard the boat....
Then we hear a grumbler say
"But the elves are all away!"
Little knowing spirits all
Are responsive to the call
Of a sympathetic heart,
And incontinently start
And their hidden forms arouse
From the music-making boughs
Where their lurking-place they made
Safe beneath some leaf's sweet shade.

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LIU PO-TUAN

PRESENT DAY.

ODE TO SHAKESPEARE

Hearken! low wails through heaven's vault
resound,
And angels' tears drip, pearl-like, to the
ground*....
That day the influence of spring was
stilled,†
And even now by thee mankind is thrilled.‡

Master of language, eager to reform,
Showing the heart surcharged with bitter
storm, ——
Three hundred years have passed 'twixt
then and now,
Yet all the world looks to that mountain's
brow!

*Supposed to change into pearls or jade as they fall.

†Nature's operations were checked.

‡This line is not translation; it is a guess at the meaning which is cancealed in a charade-like interpretation of a famous inscription on a tombstone.

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ANONYMOUS

1.

OPPORTUNITY

The cup's in the hand,
seize the hour ere 'tis fled;
How seldom in life
is the moon overhead!

2.

HIGH THINKING

Do not ask upon what
is the anchorite fed—
A stream past his window,
a book by his bed.

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3.

CHANCE

You may set with all care,
but the flow'ret will fade,
While the chance-planted willow-twig
grows into shade.

4.

DRINKING-SONG

Day by day we grow old
and have nothing to show;
Year by year we behold
the new spring coming on;
In the winecup is found
our chief joy here below;
Why grieve over flowers
too soon faded and gone?

Digitized by Google

ANONYMOUS

5.

A LAMENT

O ruthless Fate!
O cruel boon!
To meet so late
And part so soon.

6.

A LULLABY

The poplars are whispering, la-la-la,
And baby must sleep with his ma-ma-ma.
Bye-bye, baby, go sleep I say;
If Bogy comes near us, I'll drive him away.

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